

Reassessing the Public Spaces of Isamu Noguchi

Alexandra Eve Kirby

Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation
Columbia University

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Alexandra Kirby

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Advisor

Belmont Freeman
Adjunct Professor of Historic Preservation
Columbia University

Reader

Marc Treib
Professor Emeritus of Landscape Architecture
Univ. of California, Berkeley

Program Director

Andrew Dolkart
Professor of Historic Preservation
Columbia University

Reader

Theodore H. M. Prudon
Adjunct Professor of Historic Preservation
Columbia University

Abstract

This thesis discusses the three extant public spaces designed by Japanese-American sculptor Isamu Noguchi within the United States. Noguchi's artistic career, including his sculptural explorations, playground proposals and theater set designs, greatly influenced his limited landscape work. His artistic elements set him apart from traditional landscape architects of his time, making his sites evocative and symbolic, yet challenging to maintain and adequately interpret. The most vulnerable of these sites are his public plazas and parks, designed late in his career, which are subject to the vagaries of ever-changing political, cultural and economic factors. Through investigating Noguchi's three existing public spaces in the United States, recommendations are set forth to encourage a broader understanding of the artist's contribution to the urban fabric within the respective communities to promote lasting preservation measures. Additionally, *California Scenario* (1982), often hailed as Noguchi's landscape masterpiece, offers lessons in its ongoing care and preservation as a privately owned public space. Through archival research, site visits, and interviews with current stewards and stakeholders, each site has been thoroughly assessed for integrity, use and existing conditions, culminating in a survey of Noguchi's public landscapes. This thesis examines both the individual and collective significance of Noguchi's sites and identifies best practices for future interpretation and maintenance of these and of the broader scope of modernist public spaces.

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* Denotes all images contributed by the Isamu Noguchi foundation Archives.

Whatever I do is sculpture. I'm safe in saying I'm a sculptor, otherwise I'd have to say I'm all sorts of things which I really don't like.

-Isamu Noguchi,
Interview with Kitty Roedel, 1986

Introduction

Isamu Noguchi (1904 – 1988) was a prominent 20th century sculptor who pushed the boundaries of the art through explorations of abstract forms, new media, and spatial explorations. He sculpted in stone, cast metal, wood, clay, and even light and paper in his Akari lamps. Over time his work expanded into the realm of landscapes as sculptural experiences, manipulating space as he had stone and plaster. He designed earthworks and playgrounds, beginning with a handful of unrealized projects in New York City. Throughout the 1930s, Noguchi collaborated with the choreographer Martha Graham in designing avant-garde stage sets and through a friendship with Skidmore, Owings and Merrill architect, Gordon Bunshaft, he designed corporate campus gardens and plazas.¹ Each of these works exemplified the artist's remarkable talent to sculpt space, engage the human imagination, and choreograph experience. By the late 1970s, Noguchi had designed distinctive landscapes at varying scales for corporations, museums and institutions across the United States, in Jerusalem, Paris and Bologna, and throughout Japan. In 1974, a public commission in Detroit expanded from a public fountain to an entire urban plaza, and Noguchi entered the realm of urban redevelopment and civic space.

¹ The majority of Noguchi's U.S. landscapes were done in collaboration with SOM's Gordon Bunshaft: Connecticut General Life Insurance Company Building, Interior Courtyards and Gardens, 1957, Bloomfield, Connecticut; Yale University, Sunken Garden for Beineke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, 1960 – 1964, New Haven, Connecticut; Chase Manhattan Bank Plaza, 1961 – 1964, New York, New York; IBM Headquarters, Gardens, 1964, Armonk, New York

The object of this thesis is to assess the challenge of adequately interpreting and preserving Isamu Noguchi's three American public spaces: the Philip A. Hart Plaza in Detroit, Michigan (1978); the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center Plaza in Los Angeles, California (1980); and Bayfront Park in Miami, Florida (1986). Finally, *California Scenario* in Costa Mesa, California (1981), sets the stage for how public spaces benefit from common private practices. These sites are uniquely challenging not only because of the dual nature of their role as art works and public space, but also because the first three of these were developed as urban renewal projects. They are vestiges of a period in postwar history that has long been perceived as a destructive force in urban heritage. As perceptions and demands shift and modernist ideals are considered ever more unsuitable for the present-day urban experience, static public spaces are perceived anew, and countless civic plazas and city parks of the late twentieth century have been deemed unfriendly, unattractive, and unusable. This is demonstrated in the Project For Public Space's listing of Boston City Hall (Kallmann, McKinnell and Knowles, 1968) and San Francisco's United Nations Plaza (Lawrence Halprin, 1975) in their "World's Worst Public Spaces" and the recent demolition of Dan Kiley's Lincoln Center Plaza North design in New York City (1964, demolished 2009) and partial demolition of Lawrence Halprin's Skyline Park (1978, remodeled 2003) in Denver, Colorado.² These post-war landscapes are consistently condemned for their lack of shade and public amenities, immense scale and general disengagement from their urban surroundings. This reveals many of the issues faced by Noguchi's sites as universal among urban renewal landscapes of the late twentieth century.

While the majority of Noguchi's American landscapes are privately owned, these three sites are Noguchi's designs most susceptible to the whims and changing perceptions of the

² "The World's Best and Worst Parks." <http://www.pps.org/reference/september2004bestworst/>. Accessed April 30, 2013. The Project for Public Spaces (PPS) is a nonprofit planning, design and educational organization founded in 1975 dedicated to sustain public spaces as a tool for community building.

general public and the negligence of governmental agencies responsible for funding the maintenance, programming and, ultimately, the survival of the spaces. Noguchi explained that “when the time came for me to work with larger spaces, I conceived them as gardens, not as sites with objects but as relationships to a whole.”³ Present-day reassessment of the roles of Philip A. Hart Plaza, the Japanese American Community Center, and Bayfront Park as civic spaces, approaching Noguchi’s designs incrementally challenges their integrity as delicate ensembles designed as total, cohesive works. Conversely, *California Scenario* is a privately owned public space that is carefully maintained and offers various interpretive tools for the viewing public. This site will act as a benchmark for the successful preservation and programming recommendations for the sites.

These sites are already seen as relics of our past, despite the oldest of Noguchi’s American public spaces addressed in this thesis being a mere 34 years old. When constructed, these designs were understood as cultural landmarks that helped to create new post-war identities for their municipalities. Each of the public spaces was designed as a congregational center to act as the heart of the community, be it for large-scale festivals or simply a place to gather with friends on quiet days, each demonstrating Noguchi’s interest in the themes of leisure and ritual. Initially commissioned with pride and opened with great ceremony, today they stand underused and even derelict. This thesis proposes possible strategies that preservation and planning professionals can employ to meet the contemporary demands on our urban public spaces while embracing the heritage of our recent past and the cohesive character of Noguchi’s sculptural landscapes. In the following chapters, the significance of Noguchi’s designs is assessed from the individual elements to the interrelated design of the spaces as a composite; preservation recommendations are set forth, designed to address issues both broad and particular.

³ Isamu Noguchi, *The Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1987), p.11.

In his essay, “Preserving Contemporary Landscape Architecture: Is Nothing Permanent but Change Itself?”⁴ Charles Birnbaum introduces a series of recommendations for interpreting and protecting landscapes that don’t meet the 50-year category established by the National Register. Of these, this thesis emphasizes the most relevant: to establish a greater context for the landscapes, document the work, and educate owners and public stewards. The works are already well-documented by the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum, which is building an informative *catalogue raisonné* that offers a comprehensive background to his work with images of models and completed works. Custodians of the sites discussed have not taken full advantage of this resource, nor do any maintain ongoing communication with the foundation. Another category suggested by Birnbaum is consultation with the designer. While Noguchi died in 1988, shortly after the completion of these works from late in his career, his long-time associate Shoji Sadao, who oversaw plans for each of these designs, and other collaborators such as the landscape architect Ken Kammeyer may offer informed knowledge on the site designs and artist intentions. These insights should be carefully documented for future use.

Change is an inherent factor in architecture and landscape. Time wears on even the most resilient of materials – metals rust, concrete cracks, colors fade, and plants die from age, pollution and extreme conditions. Beyond natural factors, economics are an ongoing challenge, too often making consistent maintenance improbable. However, what has influenced Noguchi’s urban sculptural landscapes above all has been perception. Perhaps a gardener added flower beds, altering the horticulture of a site, the public requested greater handicap accessibility, seating was inadequate or uncomfortable, or green spaces in the surrounding area have dwindled. A public space is the fundamental property of the public, and the understanding and

⁴ Charles Birnbaum. “Preserving Contemporary Landscape Architecture: Is Nothing Permanent but Change Itself?” *Preserving the Recent Past*. Ed. Deborah Slaton and Rebecca A. Schiffer. (Washington, D.C.: Historic Preservation Education Foundation, 1995). III-03.

interpretation of a space are in constant flux. Because of this, providing educational and interpretive tools can be as powerful a preservation tool as restorative maintenance and is often the source of capital support needed to continue ongoing care and management. These tools will also fortify the public's understanding of Noguchi's intention in his designs, highlighting the importance of what may otherwise seem to be insignificant or unfavorable in regards to finishes or small design elements.

Finally, this thesis seeks to address the difficulty of categorizing Noguchi's public spaces. Isamu Noguchi was an artist, and designed urban landscapes as sculptural works. This intention creates an opportunity that traditional architecture and landscape architecture lack: the sanctity of a work of art, but only to a point. Noguchi's public spaces could easily be defined as art works; each of these case studies began as commissions for singular sculptural pieces and were conceived as sculpture by the artist.⁵ Some continue to stand as coherent art works, with a clear narrative and aesthetic, while others may be less resilient to change as much because of their contextual concerns as because of their initial design and a less cohesive character. Considering this contingent character, this thesis discusses whether Noguchi's works merit greater currency as art works versus landscapes and the implications of such a distinction. Although this thesis addresses Noguchi's urban public spaces as predominantly as art works, they have each been assessed employing the standards set forth by the U.S. Department of the Interior for evaluating a historic landscape: analyzing characteristic features and evaluating significance and integrity. With this information and consideration for potential future effects that may impact the sites, a series of preservation recommendations are proposed to protect the character each of these sites. Approaching them in such a manner guarantees a less subjective to the value of the sites.

⁵ Noguchi's models continue to be treated as conventional art works in the setting of his Long Island City museum, and are, in fact, remarkable works cast in bronze or sculpted of wood.

Since our experiences are, however, limited to momentary segments of time, growth must be the core of our existence. We are reborn, and so in art as in nature, there is growth, by which I mean change attuned to the living.⁶

- Isamu Noguchi

⁶ Diane Apostolos-Cappadona and Isamu Noguchi, *Isamu Noguchi: Essays and Conversations* (New York: H.N. Abrams in association with the Isamu Noguchi Foundation, 1994), 24. "Fourteen Americans: Isamu Noguchi," exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, 1946.

Background

Isamu Noguchi was born the son of a well-educated New York native, Leonie Gilmour, and Japanese poet, Yonejiro Noguchi. Yonejiro had found moderate success as a poet in California, where he had published numerous poems in local magazines and newspapers, as well as his first book of poems, *Seen and Unseen, or Monologues of a Homeless Snail* (1897).⁷ Through their collaborations as author and editor, Yonejiro found an admirer in Leonie, and she would act as his editor and accountant during his career in the United States. While the two were never openly in a relationship, Leonie became pregnant with Yonejiro's son in 1904. Yonejiro shortly returned to Japan alone, after living in the U.S. for ten years and disowned his illegitimate family at a time when miscegenation was not only frowned upon, but illegal in many parts of the U.S.

Leonie moved to Los Angeles, California, where her mother, Albania Gilmour, had found a home for their small family, and the child was born on November 17, 1904 at a Los Angeles charity hospital. Leonie and her mother bought a small plot of land outside of the city in a tent village of immigrants and supported themselves with Leonie's earnings from various secretarial jobs and a small vegetable garden. The young boy grew up playing in the wild and was adored by the women in his life.

In 1907, as anti-Japanese sentiments grew in the United States, Leonie moved to Japan to offer her son a chance to live where he might better fit in.⁸ Noguchi lived in Japan until the age

⁷ Yonejiro owed much of his success to the mentorship and lodging of Joaquin Miller, who he had become a close friend of, and who had brought him into his circle of artists and poets. His English was often jumbled and nonsensical, which likely added to his novel charm at a time when *Japonisme* was in full bloom in the United States.

⁸ Through the turn of the 19th Century, Americans were becoming increasingly wary of Asian residents. In 1906, following the San Francisco earthquake, white labor unions struck out against "cheap Oriental labor," and soon Japanese and Chinese children were required to attend segregated schools. This attitude was often referred to as "Yellow Peril" in the media.

of thirteen, when he was sent back to the U.S. to attend high school, but the culture of his fatherland would resonate in his work throughout his life. In 1922, Noguchi apprenticed briefly with Danish-American sculptor Gupton Borglum in his Connecticut studio, who swore that Noguchi had no future in sculpture despite offering little instruction. Noguchi enrolled in Columbia University's pre-medical program while, with his mother's encouragement, continuing his interests in sculpture through night classes at the Leonardo da Vinci Art School, where Onorio Routolo took the aspiring young sculptor under his wing.

Following a successful first exhibition at the age of 22, Noguchi dropped out of his medical studies to pursue art full-time. In 1926 he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship to study sculpture in Paris and to travel through India and China, ultimately return to his father's country. Paris proved to be a tremendous influence on Noguchi's life, where he made life-long connections in the modern art world and apprenticed for six months with sculptor Constantin Brancusi, who introduced Noguchi to stone sculpting as well as the importance of understanding a material and the proper tools to with which to work. Following his fellowship travels, Noguchi returned to the United States and held his first solo-exhibit at the Eugene Schoen Gallery, which, while no pieces sold, was a critical success and introduced him to characters who would have a profound effect on his future as a New York artist, including modern dancer Martha Graham.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1942, Noguchi and his colleagues from the Nisei Writers and Artists for Democracy were unable to convince congressional officials against developing Japanese internment camps. As an alternative, Noguchi was the sole volunteer intern at an internment camp in Poston, Arizona, where he hoped to establish an "ideal cooperative community" with the Nisei, promoting traditional arts and community activity. The experiment was ultimately a trying period for Noguchi who, during his six month stay, was unable to

connect with the community of young first-generation Japanese-Americans at the camp; but it did inspire what may be understood as his first landscape design – a layout for parks, recreational facilities and a traditionally-inspired cemetery to build morale among interned Japanese American communities. This was rejected by the War Relocation Authority, which was not interested in strengthening what were considered potential enemy communities.

As a developing artist, Noguchi discovered that he lived between worlds – he was not perceived as an American in America nor Japanese in Japan, however he was able to settle comfortably wherever he found a purpose to stay. This forged his complicated role as a cultural bridge from the East to West, and his solitary yet adaptable manner. These influences would find a place in his sculptural and landscape works, abstracting the sophisticated simplicity of Japanese culture with a deep understanding of American cultural and technology.

Playgrounds

In 1933, Noguchi submitted his first designed “playscape,” *Play Mountain*, to New York’s Public Works of Art Project (PWAP). In an interview with Paul Cummings, he later explained that he “thought that a New York City block could be much better used as a playground if it were three dimensional and in the form of a room, where you could go inside and outside – a big play object.”⁹ The design took cues from an earlier piece, *Monument to the Plough*, which was a scheme to work nearly a square mile of the earth as sculptural material in honor of the plough, which Noguchi believed to be the driving force behind the population of the Great Plains.¹⁰ The three-sided pyramidal sculpture was to have one face ploughed, one planted,

⁹ Apostolos-Cappadona, *Isamu Noguchi*, 137.

¹⁰ Masayo Duus, *The Life of Isamu Noguchi: Journey Without Borders* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 149.

and the third left fallow, representing the three phases of crop rotation. *Play Mountain* (fig. 1) was designed as a creative alternative to the mundane equipment-dependent playgrounds endorsed by Robert Moses and offered a new perspective on children's play. The varying renditions of a triangular pyramid Noguchi submitted would allow children to sled on snowy winter days, and slide into a pool of water in the hot summer months, while the structure acted as a roof with an interior play space. This marked an early transition towards ever-evolving spatial inclinations in Noguchi's career as well as a social rather than economic agenda for the artist. It was also the beginning of a notably hostile relationship between Noguchi and the New York City Parks Commissioner, Robert Moses.¹¹

Noguchi continued to explore public playground design throughout his career due to his general resistance to his works becoming *objets d'art*. Following the suicide of his close friend, artist Arshyle Gorky, in 1942, Noguchi understood the art world to be a cold and destructive force. He preferred that his works deliver a social good and wanted his designs in the hands of the general public more than private collectors, as his early figurative busts were.¹² Following World War II, Noguchi explained that "In the creation and existence of a piece of sculpture, individual possession has less significance than public enjoyment."¹³ This philosophy is most strongly embodied in his public spaces. Collectively, Noguchi designed seven children's playgrounds, only two of which were realized, but elements of play appear in many of his later public works, including those discussed in this thesis.¹⁴ More importantly, his notion of the importance of creative interaction with our built environment resonates through his civic spaces.

¹¹ Moses would later ensure that Noguchi's United Nations playground (1952) and collaboration with Louis Kahn for a Riverside Drive playground (1961 – 1966) faced too much resistance to be realized.

¹² Duus. *The Life of Isamu Noguchi*, p 150.

¹³ Apostolos-Cappadona, *Isamu Noguchi*, "Towards a Reintegration of the Arts," p.26.

¹⁴ Noguchi's first and only realized playground in the United States was the High Museum of Art's *Playscapes* (1976, fig. 2) in Atlanta's Piedmont Park, which did not employ his numerous studies of how varying topographies

Stage Design

In 1929 Noguchi met modern dancer and choreographer Martha Graham, who subsequently commissioned him to create two portrait busts of her. In 1935 Graham later commissioned Noguchi to design a set for her new piece, *Frontier*. This collaboration marked the beginning of a thirty-one year relationship that allowed Noguchi to explore in depth his childhood fascination with mythology, upon which Graham's pieces relied heavily, and interest in the human body in a sculpted space.¹⁵ While Noguchi had no formal background in theater or stage design, he approached the task with an understanding of the Japanese *Noh* theater, with its highly codified style and standardized stage. Noguchi's theater designs developed his understanding of the figure in motion and how simple elements can enliven an environment. Graham and Noguchi would collaborate on twenty-two productions. In making the transition from the stage to the landscape, Noguchi brought an acute understanding of space, how sculptural forms activate such space, and the body in motion. This was the beginning of his personal comprehension of the "space as sculpture," and the experiences that take place within a space.

The Modern Landscape

Unlike formally trained modernist landscape architects such as Lawrence Halprin, Dan Kiley, and M. Paul Friedberg, Isamu Noguchi approached the landscape as an artist rather than a

can act as an engaging spatial element for children as effectively as his previous designs. His other realized playscape, Kodomo No Kuni (1965 – 1966), is located near Tokyo, Japan.

Noguchi's playground designs are comprised of: *Play Mountain*, 1933; *Contoured Playground*, 1941; Playground Equipment for Ala Moana Park, Hawaii, 1939; United Nations Headquarters Playground, 1952; Riverside Drive Playground, in collaboration with Louis Kahn, 1961 – 1966; Kodomo No Kuni Playground, Tokyo, Japan, 1965 – 1966, realized; *Playscapes*, Commissioned by the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia 1975 – 1976, realized. Many of these designs would later be cast in bronze and effectively become traditional sculpture.

¹⁵ Martin Friedman, *Noguchi's Imaginary Landscapes* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1978) 27.

horticulturist or architect – with a different set of sensitivities and a different sense of space. He can be understood as what Marc Treib coins an “environmental artist” more than a landscape architect.¹⁶ Noguchi had no formal training in landscape architecture, nor did he enter his projects with a primary concern for the ecology or the topography of the site. Rather, he focused on ritual, ceremony, myth, drama and leisure, fused with a desire to link the local culture to nature. There is less consideration in his designs for environmental elements than a landscape architect would take, leaving his expansive spaces exposed to harsh midday sun or lacking in places of respite, and his use of plants often seems to be an afterthought. Additionally, Noguchi left the broader detailing of these spaces to his partner, Shoji Sadao, who didn’t practice the same artistic approach, with Noguchi’s artistic attention to fine details. This can be felt in the finishes and landscaping where such elements may seem trivial to an architect, contrasting with Noguchi’s meticulous approach to his sculptural works. Such details are considerably more refined in *California Scenario*, where the collaboration of landscape architect Ken Kammeyer aided in both the sensitivity to the human experience and the presence of carefully curated plantings.¹⁷ Such collaborations did not take place in his three public designs.

Noguchi’s first landscape work was the *Reader’s Digest* Garden in Tokyo, Japan, for a building designed by the architect Antonin Raymond in 1951. In 1958, architect Marcel Breuer invited Noguchi to work on a garden for the UNESCO building in Paris. While his original commission was to create a patio aside the Secretariat building, Noguchi ultimately developed a garden linking the Breuer design to a pre-existing building.¹⁸ The critical success of his *Jardin Japonais* at UNESCO established Noguchi as a landscape designer and he was subsequently

¹⁶ Marc Treib, *Noguchi in Paris: The UNESCO Garden* (San Francisco : William Stout Publishers, 2003) .

¹⁷ Additionally, Kammeyer continues to make regular visits to the site to this day, ensuring the longevity of his contributions.

¹⁸ Alexander Calder was intended to install a piece on this site, which was relocated to an interior space.

commissioned in the United States by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, where the architect Gordon Bunshaft sought his temperate and creative style to relate to the sleek corporate designs for IBM, CIGNA, Chase Manhattan Bank and numerous other clients. While these sites are labeled as gardens and courtyards, they principally act as symbolic sculptures in condensed, private spaces.

Over time Noguchi's visual vocabulary in landscape design became more clearly developed and refined, and while he commonly used similar elements and motifs, his designs speak distinctly to their locality and the ethos of the specific project. In 1968, at the age of 64, Noguchi published an autobiography, *A Sculptor's World*, which in many ways acted as a step away from his past three decades of production to a shift in his artistic approach, becoming ever bolder in his creative endeavors and increasingly inspired by new technologies. He established his studio on the island of Shikoku, Japan, in 1969, where he had selected his stones for the UNESCO Garden. In his work there he further balanced his eastern and western influences. This evolution set the stage for Noguchi's entrance into urban-scale public projects that included his *Red Cube*, balanced on a single corner before the Marine Midland Bank Building (1968) in lower Manhattan, *Sky Viewing Sculpture* (1969) at Western Washington State College in Bellingham, *Portal* (1976) at the Cuyahoga Justice Center in Cleveland, Ohio, and numerous large-scale outdoor installations for museums throughout the 1970s.

Noguchi's sculptural motifs also continued to expand in the 1970s and 80s. He cast numerous pieces in sheets of galvanized steel, aluminum and bronze, bent in forms that can be perceived as two-dimensional from one vantage point and as a new three-dimensional work from another. His stone works expressed new textural modes on volcanic granite and obsidian, and smooth cylinders of mixed types of stone that bend and undulate into abstract portals. Noguchi

additionally continued to explore forms for new fountain designs. All of these motifs are expressed in varied forms throughout his public spaces, some of which read more clearly as sculptural collections than singular works, while others display them throughout their highly consistent designs.

Noguchi's style cannot be defined within a distinct movement or approach, although his works were strongly influenced by modernist thought, working with clean lines, simplified planes, and abstraction to create elegant and evocative spaces that sparked the imagination. The landscapes discussed in this thesis were additionally subject to contemporary thought regarding the role of civic space at the time. Modernist concepts such as Le Corbusier's *Ville Radieuse* continued to influence urban planning through the late 1970s and 1980s, embracing wide open spaces within densely populated urban cores constructed of high rise towers. Perhaps this inheritance set the tone for the contemporary distaste for civic plazas and parks, many of which didn't suit modern use as originally intended. In Noguchi's case, these are visual spaces and don't cater to the contemporary desire for usability. As Peter Blake points out in *Form Follows Fiasco*, during this period "the street was replaced by parks (okay for Sundays), by squares (okay for demonstrations), by playgrounds (child ghettos) and shopping centers." The vibrancy of historic communal spaces was sacrificed decades before to the sterilization of postwar planning, and while Noguchi sought to create dynamic and vibrant places for social activity, the stage had been set for his sites to be isolated and easily overlooked without the proper programming, creating an intrinsic dependence upon governing agencies to act as stewards for the life of the sites.

Illustrations

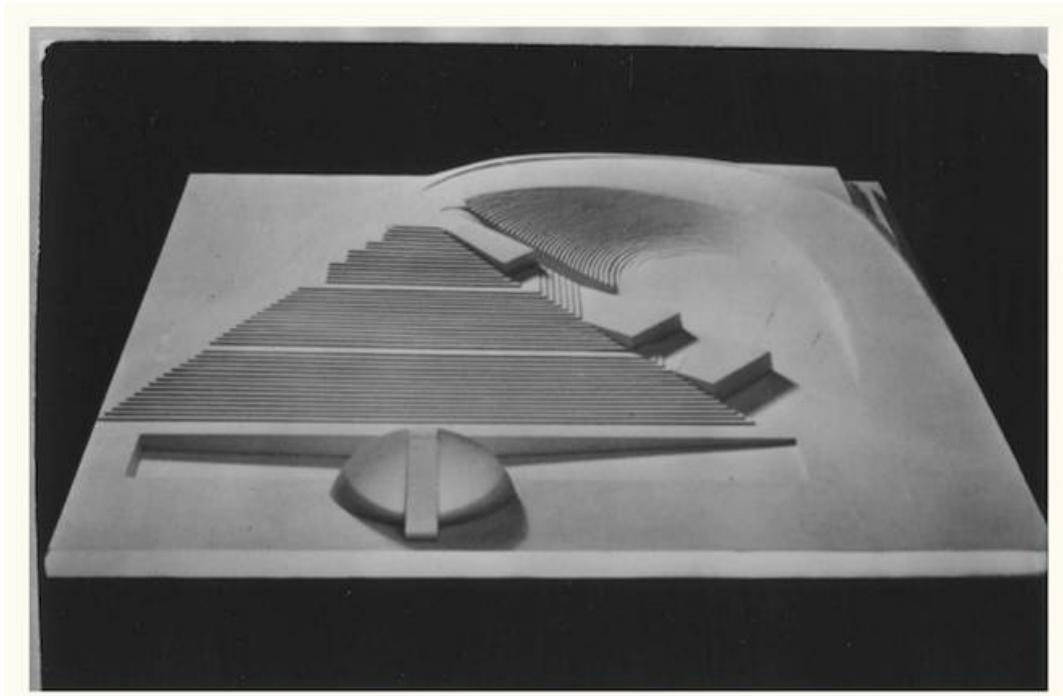


Figure 1. *Play Mountain* Model, 1933 - 1985. Courtesy of The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum. Image 114A.



Figure 2. *Playscapes*, Piedmont Park, Atlanta, Georgia. 1975 – 1976 Exterior and equipment design. Courtesy of The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum. Image 749.

Chapter One: Philip Hart Plaza, Detroit, Michigan 1971 - 1979

Philip Hart Plaza is located south of Detroit's downtown, on the river and looking south to Windsor, Canada. It is the quiet civic center of a city that has become an icon of post-industrial urban decay. The eight-acre plaza, originally conceived as the central locale for Detroit's civic events, is situated at the southern edge of the city's radial street plan, elevated above the edge of the Detroit River with the UAW-Ford National Programs Center (previously the Veterans Memorial Building) and Cobo Convention Center to the west. To the north Jefferson Avenue separates the plaza from the high rises of Detroit's downtown and financial district, creating a backdrop of diverse architectural styles. To the east, one can see the vacant footprint of the former Ford Auditorium, demolished in 2011, and the General Motors Renaissance Center.

In 1970 Noguchi collaborated with Japanese architect Kenzo Tange to design a fountain for Expo '70, held in Osaka, Japan. His designs treated visitors to a vision of water that "jetted down one hundred feet, rotated, sprayed, and swirled... disappeared and reappeared as mist,"¹⁹ through a use of computer automation. The Osaka fountains received critical acclaim, and in 1972 Noguchi was invited to propose a design for a fountain for the Hart Plaza. That year Detroit received a generous bequest of two million dollars by widow Anna Thompson Dodge in honor of her late husband, American automotive innovator, Horace E. Dodge, Sr. and their son.²⁰

¹⁹ Isamu Noguchi. *The Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1987), p.174. Noguchi worked with a group called the fountain makers association, who eagerly worked to realize his imaginative designs.

²⁰ Mrs. Dodge had hoped to give the city a fountain similar to the Magic Fountain of Montjuic in Barcelona, however the grandiose Renaissance-inspired scheme didn't suit the modern identity the city of Detroit was seeking to establish.

With the land set aside for a new plaza where the fountain would be located, the firm of Smith, Hinchman & Grylls, was chosen for the plaza design and a Fountain Selection Committee established to select a designer. The site, later named in honor of U.S. Senator Philip A. Hart, was to be redeveloped as a new riverfront civic center.²¹ Noguchi's concept for the site was well received and Bob Hastings – who acted as both a chairman on the selection committee and member of Smith, Hinchman & Grylls – proposed that Noguchi design the entire plaza “as the only way to have it harmonize with the fountain.”²² Both the fountain and plaza designs were accepted and Noguchi began planning the eight-acre site with Shoji Sadao, his architectural partner at Fuller and Sadao.

History

The site of Hart Plaza marks the approximate location where Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac founded Fort Pontchartrain du Detroit in 1701, which quickly developed to a busy port city, dependent on the river's course. Following a destructive fire in 1805, Chief Justice Augustus B. Woodward, inspired by L'Enfant's radial plan for Washington, D.C., laid out a new street plan for the growing city with a central “Grand Circus” expanding south in six rays. Woodward Avenue, named in his honor, cut through the center to the waterfront (*fig. 1*). In 1812, the U.S./Canadian border was established and in 1825 the Erie Canal was completed, efficiently connecting the Detroit River to the Atlantic Ocean. Industry rapidly expanded on the waterfront (*fig. 2*).

²¹ Downtown Detroit had seen significant commercial development in the 1960s and 70s in a modernist aesthetic. One Woodward Avenue, facing the plaza at the corner of Jefferson and Woodward, was the first realized skyscraper designed by Minoru Yamasaki, completed in 1963 for the Michigan Consolidated Gas Company.

²² Noguchi. *The Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1987), p.178.

Prior to the development of Hart Plaza, the city's riverfront was heavily developed for shipping and manufacturing. A 1951-revised Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows that the Hart Plaza site included a multi-story parking facility and a Sam's Drugs and Shoes, with smaller surrounding structures, reflecting a shift in uses and the ever-growing impact of the automobile in the city. In the mid-1950s, the city began to raze the waterfront structures with plans to create a civic center, beginning with the 1956 completion of the Ford Auditorium, designed by Odell, Hewlett, and Luckenbach.

In 1966, Mayor Jerome Cavanaugh adopted Lyndon B. Johnson's Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act (also known as the Model Cities Act). \$490 million in federal funding was invested into a nine square-mile section of Detroit's inner city in the hope of setting new standards in urbanization and an attempt to quell poverty.²³ At this time the city was facing numerous escalating social and economic issues – job losses due to increased automation, plant closures and new tax policies in automotive manufacturing; rapid suburbanization as manufacturers moved outside of the city and middle class homes continued to develop further afield; and a decrease in educational funding and social services. The mid-sixties were also a time of social unrest, with the African American population growing rapidly within the city, yet under-represented and facing ongoing discrimination from police and in the work force, leading to the 1967 Detroit riot.²⁴ These factors exacerbated social stigmas surrounding Detroit, and depopulation continued into the 2000s.

A renewal effort to reconstruct the city's image and retain the dwindling population was made in 1970 by a private group called the "Detroit Renaissance," strongly endorsed by Mayor Roman Gribbs and financially backed by private business owners. Plans aimed to rebuild the

²³ Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City* (Detroit: University of Michigan Press. 1989).

²⁴ While whites did participate in the riots, they were largely perceived as a race riot in the media.

city's waterfront from the Ambassador Bridge, linking Ontario and Detroit to the west, to the MacArthur Bridge, connecting the city with Belle Isle, a Frederick Law Olmsted-designed public park, to the east. This revitalization effort produced the Renaissance Center, the Detroit People Mover, new assembly plants, residential developments and restored historic landmarks, and continues to this day in projects such as the new Ford Field (2002) and Comerica Baseball Stadium (2000).

Today Detroit suffers devastation from decades of disinvestment. Once the wealthiest and fourth largest city in the nation, its population has declined dramatically since its apex in the 1950s, 25% just in the past decade. This has in turn reduced the tax base, cutting funding for capital improvements, in an ongoing cycle active since the early 1960s.²⁵

Design

*What is important above all is the sense of space that Hart Plaza supplies.
An opening to the sky and to the Detroit River. A horizon for the people.*²⁶

-Isamu Noguchi

Noguchi's design aimed to accommodate various pedestrian activities, but was largely a broad open space for civic events with limited green space and a fountain as a centerpiece. Mayor Coleman Young, who had inherited the project from his predecessor, was enthusiastic about the concept, but asked Noguchi where he planned to accommodate the annual ethnic festival. In response, Noguchi explained that it would be located "downstairs," an element that

²⁵ Katherine Seelye. "Detroit Census Confirms a Desertion Like No Other," *New York Times*. March 22, 2011. The 2010 Census reported Detroit's population as 713,777, over 60% below its peak population of over 1.8 million in 1950.

²⁶ *Isamu Noguchi: The Sculpture of Space*. (Exhibition catalogue, New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1980), 29.

had yet to be considered, and a lower level was quickly folded into the plans. The plaza was located on what had previously been a parking lot, which, due to poor soil conditions, had to be elevated on piles sixteen feet above the riverbank. The new lower level provided inconspicuous space for a riverside service road, a restaurant, access to nearby facilities and an amphitheater for the ethnic festival, while maintaining the dominant aesthetic simplicity of Noguchi's original idea.²⁷ At the time of its completion, Philip Hart Plaza was Noguchi's largest work, yet unlike his later public sites, the identity of the sculptural design was not lost in its scale.

The Plaza

Hart Plaza consists of two primary elements: Dodge Fountain and the Pylon at the Jefferson Avenue entrance. Secondary aspects include a ziggurat in the southeast corner of the plaza and the amphitheater leading into the underground promenade (*fig. 3*). The general design radiates outward from the fountain, which is surrounded by open space with imaginative additions to the topography for seating and play. Detroit's main thoroughfare, Woodward Avenue, intersects with Jefferson Avenue at the far northeast corner of the plaza. Noguchi and Sadao decided to continue this visual axis as a diagonal that led directly to the fountain and set the Pylon as a fulcrum for this directional shift: "making for its most magnificent entry."²⁸ To provide shade from summer heat, green spaces with groves of trees were planned along Jefferson Avenue and the plaza's edges leading to the river. Interestingly, none of Noguchi's design elements has an explicit use – each captures the imagination in its abstracted simplicity (*fig. 4*).

The underground level encompasses two acres, partially exposed to the open air, as seen in the central amphitheater, and partially interior, with a number of enclosed concessions,

²⁷ Martin Friedman. *Noguchi's Imaginary Landscapes*. (Minneapolis: Walker Art Museum. 1978), p. 80.

²⁸ Fuller and Sadao. *Hart Plaza Overview*. File Source: Pro: Detroit, Michigan – Dodge Fountain and plaza, 1975 – 79, 2/3. Source: Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

security facilities, an art gallery, and service access. Because the commercial spaces beneath the plaza surface required ducts for ventilation, bulkheads were required on the plaza, which Noguchi accommodated by building tall cylinders. This addition to the design seems somewhat intrusive in the overall scheme of the main level.

The entire plaza is paved in carnelian granite – a red and black flecked stone from South Dakota. There are two sizes of pavers – four foot square and six inch square. The large pavers were finished with a “mellogroove” surface with a clean cut on the edges. These mark primary walkways through the plaza, wrapping widely around the fountain and leading across the east-west axis from the ziggurat to the rear of the Veteran’s Memorial Building. The smaller pavers have a rougher thermal finish with an irregular “guillotine” edge rather than a smooth, sawed edge. These were laid immediately around the fountain, in a sweeping form around the amphitheater and along the water front. The rough surface creates a darker appearance and gives a dynamic aesthetic to the hardscaping of the plaza. Noguchi requested that these slabs be pointed with a dark mortar to highlight the reddish hue of the granite.²⁹ Approximately one-hundred feet west of the fountain, the granite tiles dip into a shallow circular depression set into the surface, and to the north a rectangle of square granite slabs at varying heights allows for play or rest (*fig. 5*).

²⁹ Letter from Cold Spring Granite Company to Isamu Noguchi, April 20, 1976. File Source: Pro: Detroit, Michigan – Dodge Fountain and plaza, 1975 – 79, 2/3. Source: Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

Horace E. Dodge & Son Memorial Fountain

*The great fountain, projected to be the most significant of modern times, will rise from the plateau of primal space. It will be an engine for water, plainly associating its spectacle to its source of energy, an engine so deeply a part of Detroit. It will recall and commemorate the dream that has produced the automobile, the airplane, and now the rocket, a machine become a poem.*³⁰

-Isamu Noguchi

Originally Noguchi's fountain plan was a circular form with two wings, braced on granite supports above the ground, allowing water to pour off of either wing (*fig. 6*). This was modified to a design with two cylindrical stainless steel legs that rise from the plaza, supporting a massive ring thirty feet above the ground. The fountain looks alien in its futuristic material and form, and Noguchi wanted it to "represent our times and our relationship to outerspace."³¹ Below, a granite pool stands approximately six feet in height with a stainless steel grate to collect water around its circular base.

300 water jets within the ring enact variations of water movement, much like Noguchi's fountains in Osaka, and from below the granite pool, the water jets upwards towards the center. Noguchi later explained, "overwhelmed by the thought of two million dollars for a fountain, I tried to make it the most advanced."³² The fountain became a technological spectacle, offering a cycle of thirty-three different combinations of waterflow between the granite pool and overhead ring, pumping 45,000 gallons of water per hour (*figs. 8, 9, 10*).³³

³⁰ Isamu Noguchi, typescript of presentation to Fountain Selection Committee, March 1973. File Source: Pro: Detroit, Michigan – Dodge Fountain and plaza, 1975 – 79, 2/3. Source: Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

³¹ Friedman. *Noguchi's Imaginary Landscapes*, p. 80. The early 1960s had seen the first manned space shuttle flights, and in 1969 the United States' *Apollo 11* safely landed on the surface of the moon. This was a time of great technological optimism despite the conflicts of the Cold War and Space Race.

³² Noguchi. *The Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum*. p.178.

³³ "Ready to make a Splash," *Detroit Free Press*. June 22, 1976. File Source: Pro: Detroit, Michigan – Dodge Fountain and plaza, 1975 – 79, 2/3. Source: Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

The fountain is designed to be interactive as well as visually stimulating. The system recycles and chlorinates the water, making it safe for water play. Noguchi explained that “there is no lake around it because if you had one, all that space would be removed from pedestrian use... and (of great importance) it [doesn’t] spray people too much.”³⁴ Noguchi was aiming to challenge standards in public design and in the urban experience, offering alternatives within each of his sculptural elements.

Pylon

In an early plan by Smith, Hinchman and Grylls, a tall tower was placed at the entrance of the plaza. Noguchi adopted this concept and transformed it into a 120-foot stainless steel pylon, seven feet square at its base, twisting into a helix as it rises, needle-like, into the sky (*fig. 13*).³⁵ The pylon symbolizes the ongoing “rebirth” of Detroit taking place in the 1970s, and is also a gateway to the city, abstracting the historic form of traditional pylons of ancient Greece and Egypt while embracing modern materials, technologies, and science. Creating this design required elaborate steel tubing and angle-iron trussing determined by a team of engineers.³⁶ Noguchi donated the completed sculpture as an incentive to move the plaza design forward and express his investment in the project, placing it as an anchor between the plaza and Woodward Avenue (*fig. 14*).

Ziggurat

A concrete ziggurat stands at the far southeast corner of the plaza, overlooking the river. To the north of the pyramidal form a theater submerged below the plaza grade, though this

³⁴ Friedman. *Noguchi’s Imaginary Landscapes*, p. 80.

³⁵ The helix form of DNA had only recently been discovered by James D. Watson and Francis Crick in 1953.

³⁶ Friedman. *Noguchi’s Imaginary Landscapes*, p. 80.

portion does not connect with the functions of the commercial spaces below the plaza. A small open air theater results, with ample seating for weekend performances, or, alternatively, a place for children to climb and explore while parents rest. Unfortunately this corner of the plaza is extremely isolated, with a veil of trees surrounding the upper level of the stage space and limited visual access from the surrounding plaza. This is now a prime location for graffiti, skateboarding and illicit activity in a city that cannot afford to provide ongoing security for quiet public spaces. Additionally, the concrete of the ziggurat is severely damaged from oxidation of rebar within the concrete, causing severe cracking (*fig. 20*).

While many aspects of the design reflect Noguchi's ongoing interest in archaic forms and human ritual, the Dodge Fountain and Pylon are explicit feats of technology using new methods in engineering and computerization for rhythmic water flows. Philip A. Hart Plaza marks a break from his earlier sculptural landscapes with SOM not only in its scale, but his perception of space and its uses by a broad public. Rather than simply a place of beauty, the plaza was intended as a site for civic engagement, large celebrations and festivals, for ritual and for leisure (*fig. 15*).

Current Context

Philip Hart Plaza has been subject to a number of changes that have challenged the unity of Noguchi's design from early after its completion. In July, 1979, Noguchi wrote to Mayor Young expressing his concern about the maintenance of the plaza, which had become wildly popular, at times hosting events with over 100,000 attendants. "Such a use must put great stress

on facilities which were hardly planned for such numbers.”³⁷ A 1988 letter from Isamu Noguchi to Central Business District Association Director Diane Edgecomb, addressed the addition of a new lighting scheme in the park that he had previously rejected. The letter reads:

As you must know I am the one who worked on what there is there starting in 1971, over a period of seven years. The design is mine to the smallest detail. The Pylon was my free gift to get things going. The company I formed, together with Shoji Sadao to assist me, received hardly anything because the working drawings which accurately followed our specifications had to be done by Smith Hinchman Grylls and they took 60%, I hope you will appreciate that I feel I deserve consideration in whatever transpires in Hart Plaza...

The flagpoles are a hodgepot [sic] of flags with light fixtures; the light stands entirely decorative... I suggested that tall poles for general lighting could be used at the perimeter... Imagine my shock on visiting Hart Plaza on July 3rd and finding a forest of bright aluminum poles crowding in on the fountain; in direct confrontation with the fountain. This type of fussy light fixtures [is] no doubt intended to bring interest to buildings where this is lacking. The globes of light are intended to light themselves, to draw attention, and are not an efficient source of lighting for the space. This is probably why there are so many.

It would be nice and appropriate if the designers work could be respected when changes or ‘improvements’ are made by others. I was not informed.

I hope you will understand my distress.³⁸

Clearly, Noguchi remained invested in his project nearly a decade after its completion and just months before his death in December, 1988. These incompatible lights remain and distract from the original plans; maintenance continues to be of great concern. Further disruptive additions include security cameras and cell phone antennae (*fig. 16, 17*).³⁹

In 2003, *Transcending, The Legacy of Labor Monument*, was dedicated, honoring the role of laborers in Detroit (*fig. 18*). The sixty-three-foot-tall monument, stands on a wide circular

³⁷ Isamu Noguchi Letter to Mayor Coleman Young, August 22, 1979. File Source: Pro: Detroit, Michigan – Dodge Fountain and plaza, 1975 – 79, 2/3. Source: Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

³⁸ Isamu Noguchi letter to Diane Edgewater. July 8, 1988. File Source: Pro: Detroit, Michigan – Dodge Fountain and plaza, 1975 – 79, 2/3. Source: Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

³⁹ Security cameras are managed by Homeland Security as well as the Recreation Department and are running regularly. Email interview with Alicia Minter, Director of the City of Detroit Recreation Department. March 15, 2013.

base immediately west of the Pylon, creating a highly visible landmark looking down Woodward Avenue from Detroit's financial district and from approaches on Jefferson Avenue – a central highway that leads to the Canadian customs tunnel and Renaissance Center. The monument, designed by the artists David Barr and Sergio De Giusti, symbolizes the pride of Detroit's strong labor unions. It has a number of informational plaques in addition to the figurative bas relief designs set into the fourteen boulders beneath its broken arc (*fig. 19*).

In 2006, Gretchen Valade, who sponsors the annual free jazz festivals in Hart Plaza, funded the refurbishment of the Dodge Fountain, which was rededicated in 2006. This included reprogramming the fountain's computerized water designs in the spirit of Noguchi's original intentions.⁴⁰ In Valade's honor, a small cast stone monument was installed on the southern edge of the plaza, commemorating her contribution. The installation uses a plaque made of polished carnelian granite, but aside from this detail it is in no way compatible with the plaza aesthetic. The restoration of the fountain, however, was a generous and thoughtful improvement in a public space in need of greater local investment. Unfortunately, the fountain is only turned on for planned events in warm months.⁴¹

The plaza is managed by the city's recreation and general services departments, the private/public Downtown Detroit Partnership, and the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, which was established in 2003 to reconnect the city to the neglected waterfront. Efforts by the Conservancy have been quite successful in revitalizing the area.⁴² The Parks and Recreation department is responsible for renting out Hart Plaza and collects all fees for private and public events. Events that take place at the plaza include the Detroit International Jazz Festival, the

⁴⁰ No information is available regarding the previous state of the fountain or technological issues. Valade is an heiress to the Carhart Cotton Overalls Company.

⁴¹ Email interview with Alicia Minter, Director of the City of Detroit Recreation Department. March 15, 2013.

⁴² By 2007, a "Riverwalk" was nearly complete from Hart Plaza to the MacArthur Bridge, linking the city to Belle Isle. This effort is continuing to the west to Joe Louis Arena and beyond.

Detroit Electronic Music Festival and ethnic events including the Arab and Chaldean World and African World Festivals. For these events the plaza is cleaned, food vendors temporarily fill in lower level store fronts, and the space is filled with people as Noguchi had originally intended. The plaza receives a majority of its funding through these events, although it is cycled through the Parks and Recreation Department, ultimately returning very little to maintaining the space.

Future Planning

Alicia Minter, Director of the City of Detroit Recreation Department, explained that there are conceptual plans to change the physical design of the Hart Plaza and create more green open space to transition to the riverfront. She writes that “It is a hard surface plaza with small amounts of green space. It requires a tremendous amount of capital for ADA compliance and general improvements.”⁴³ While these tentative plans are not available at this date, it seems important to take into account both Noguchi’s letter of 1988 expressing dismay over incompatible alterations to his design, as well as the fact that this plaza was expressly designed for high traffic, with the present hardscaping remaining untouched since its installation in the mid-1970s, aside from poor repointing and caulking of joints. Green landscaping is not ideal for the volume of traffic generated by events such as the hugely popular Movement Electronic Music Festival, which takes place over the course of a week early in the summer, with over 100,000 visitors to the plaza. Additionally, lawns would not fare well in Detroit’s extreme climate without considerable maintenance.

In the winter of 2012, AIA Detroit’s Urban Priorities Committee held its annual international “Detroit by Design” competition, focusing on the city’s waterfront. The

⁴³ Email interview with Alicia Minter, Director of the City of Detroit Recreation Department. March 15, 2013.

competition received 174 entries from architectural firms and artists across the globe proposing creative, although rarely rational, approaches to how to reactivate the urban edge of Detroit. Winning submissions were selected by a jury comprised of the architect Daniel Libeskind, the landscape architect Walter Hood, Cranbrook Academy of Art and Museum Director Reed Kroloff, Detroit Riverfront Conservancy President Faye Alexander Nelson, and the Toronto-based architect Lola Sheppard.⁴⁴ Of the six winning entries, only one was from the United States – Atelier WHY of Jersey City. The proposed designs were largely exercises in creative thinking to offer innovative approaches to the longstanding issues surrounding the waterfront and broader issues of Detroit as a whole, and were clearly not founded in experience or understanding of the existing site but, rather, as a stage for radical design. The competition objective was: *Amazing and Connected*, emphasizing the need for physical, visual and historic connectivity and new ideas, but the literature for competitors lacks significant contextual background for thoughtful and transformative design, and adequate reference to the value of the Noguchi design. This competition shows the growing international recognition of Detroit's urban planning challenges, but aimed for a *carte blanche* approach rather than embracing the distinctive extant resources on the waterfront, such as Hart Plaza.

Recommendations

Philip Hart Plaza is currently in mediocre condition due to neglect and insensitive alterations, but it is critical that before the aesthetic and structural conditions of the park can realistically be remedied, the greater societal and economic conditions surrounding the plaza will need to be addressed. Additionally, city funding is currently focused on critical social programs,

⁴⁴ People's Choice winners were selected by voting via social media website Facebook.

and adequate funding would need to come from either additional programming within the park or from federal or state programs specifically earmarked for the park. The following recommendations have been written in light of these conditions.

Activation

- Following the completion of the full Riverwalk project, the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy will oversee the maintenance and programming of the three-mile stretch of the river and nearby parks and plazas. This is a unique opportunity not only to provide greater public understanding of the plaza, but a stronger alliance between public and private funding and maintenance of the plaza, which will certainly benefit from the pedestrian traffic generated by the renewed Riverwalk.
- In 2011, the Detroit-Wayne County Port Authority opened a portion of the waterfront as a cruise ship terminal. This included the installation of a terminal building at the water's edge, which is not highly visible from the plaza and offers limited access to the plaza. Instead, the port arrival gate steers visitors directly to the Renaissance Center. Connections to the park from this small terminal should be strengthened with clear walkways and signage. This would also create a gate into Detroit from visiting cruises, rather than channeling all visitors into the hermetic environment of the Renaissance Center, which offers very little of Detroit's distinctive character.
- Create stronger connections to downtown Detroit:
 - highlight the park on maps of the People Mover (*fig. 23*), which loops through the downtown core;
 - create safer access across Jefferson Avenue with longer pedestrian crossing times and more clearly marked walk ways;
 - develop more appealing access to and from Cobo Center and the Renaissance Center.

- Hold additional weekday events in the plaza, such as farmers markets or food fairs, providing fresh vegetables and lunch options for the downtown work force, which is gradually recovering.⁴⁵
- Provide more public parking, perhaps in the footprint of the Ford Auditorium until new plans are developed, to generate public funds for the park and offer a low-cost alternative to the many private parking garages nearby that cater to tourists staying in the Renaissance Center or going to sporting and convention events.
- Initiate a local volunteer program, managed by the Riverfront Conservancy, to tend to weekly maintenance of the park, making the space cleaner and safer and instilling a sense of ownership in the community.

Education

- One inconspicuous commemorative plaque honor's Noguchi's design work, tucked into a stairwell into a secondary path to the lower level. In contrast, the *Transcending* memorial has two large plaques and a map explaining, in detail, the organization of the piece. Noguchi's design merits a clear map at entry points with a brief explanation of the plaza's history and significance.
- The Detroit Institute of Art (DIA) hosts a remarkable collection of art three miles north of the plaza. The museum hasn't had a show exploring Noguchi's work or contribution to the city since his *Imaginary Landscapes* show in 1979. Local agencies could arrange a show with the Noguchi Garden Museum, the DIA and other stakeholders to reawaken Noguchi's presence and instill a sense of pride in the city's own piece. The city has seen a growing number of young artists moving to the city, and this fact may not be well known among newcomers to the city.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Detroit's Eastern Market has a highly successful farmer's market every Saturday in empty warehouses. The event is hugely popular among locals and tourists and few similar alternatives for fresh produce are currently available.

⁴⁶ The DIA offers free admission to all Wayne County residents.

- Highlight the plaza in tourist guides at nearby hotels, such as the RenCen, emphasizing the plaza's proximity and historic value as the work of a master sculptor.
- Register the plaza with DoCoMoMo as a significant modernist landmark of artistic, social and technological merit, placing it on an international platform for discussion.
- Seek registration and recognition with the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office.
- Local preservation agencies, such as Preservation Detroit, should feature the site as one of Detroit's premier modernist designs under threat, rallying the local preservation advocates to become familiar with the history and artistic value of the plaza and share the information with neighbors, educators and local businesses. These agencies could also incorporate the space into local walking tours.

Restoration

- Create a comprehensive master plan for the plaza, or better yet, the entire waterfront. By drafting long-term goals and establishing what are valued as historic and visual resources within the plaza, the plaza would have a long-standing preservation tool for generations of planners to reference. Ms. Minter, Director of the Recreation Department, stated that a master plan and plaza "upgrades" are in the planning phase, which cannot be made publicly available. This process should involve consultation by the Noguchi Foundation and Shoji Sadao to ensure protection of the plaza's character and integrity.
- Broken granite slabs should be replaced in kind with surface treatment and edges properly managed. (*fig. 20*)
- Consider Noguchi's letter regarding lighting and speak with Shoji Sadao to discuss more compatible alternatives to provide lighting for night events and safety.
- Reconstruct damaged lower level of Ziggurat. (*fig. 21*)

- Place cellphone antennae in alternate, less visible locations.

Ultimately, Philip Hart Plaza faces severe social, political, and perceptual problems that surmount the physical. Compromised since soon after the inaugural opening, the integrity of the park continues to be impacted by neglect and inadequate funding. Fortunately, the central pieces of the plaza – Dodge Fountain and the Pylon – are in good condition and valued within the community, although their impact is lost with the degradation and unsympathetic additions to the surrounding space designed to enhance them. As Noguchi's first civic space, the Hart Plaza is well defined in its artistic merit, with elements relating to one another in both overt and subtle ways. Every material was carefully chosen, deliberately placed, and the entire process was overseen by the artist and his associates. It would be a great misfortune for the city of Detroit and the art world to lose this eccentric cultural and artistic gem in the wake of such design coming back into fashion. By developing a constituency within the highly motivated community of artistically and locally invested public, Philip Hart Plaza has the potential to shift its perception as a blighted space to an iconic revitalized civic center.

Illustrations

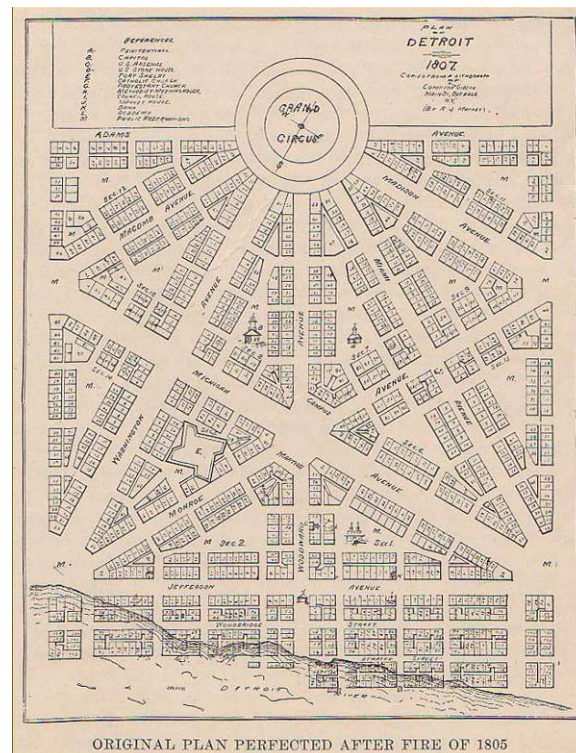


Figure 1. 1807 Detroit Downtown plan following 1805 Fire.



Figure 2. 1930s aerial image of Detroit Waterfront. Courtesy of Wayne State University Virtual Motor City Project.

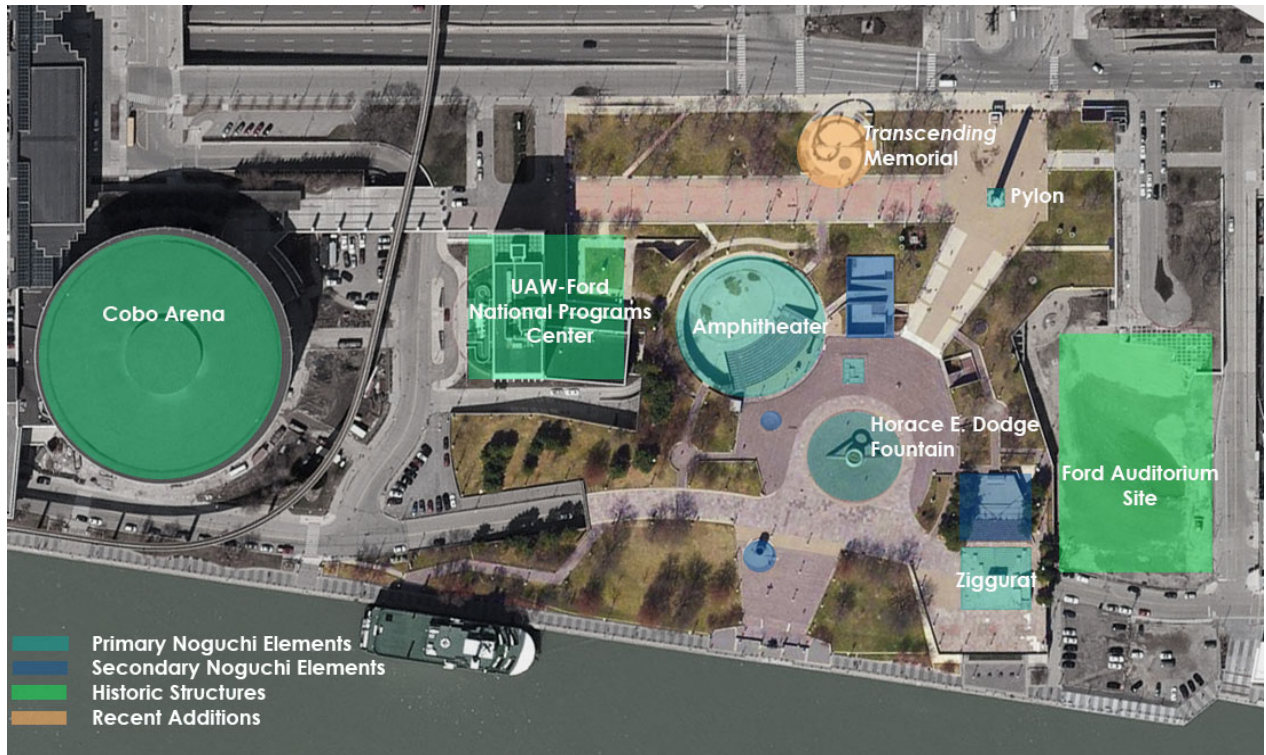


Figure 3. Present aerial of Philip A. Hart Plaza, Courtesy of Bing Maps, Map data 2013, Sanborn. Map data: Bing Maps, 2013.

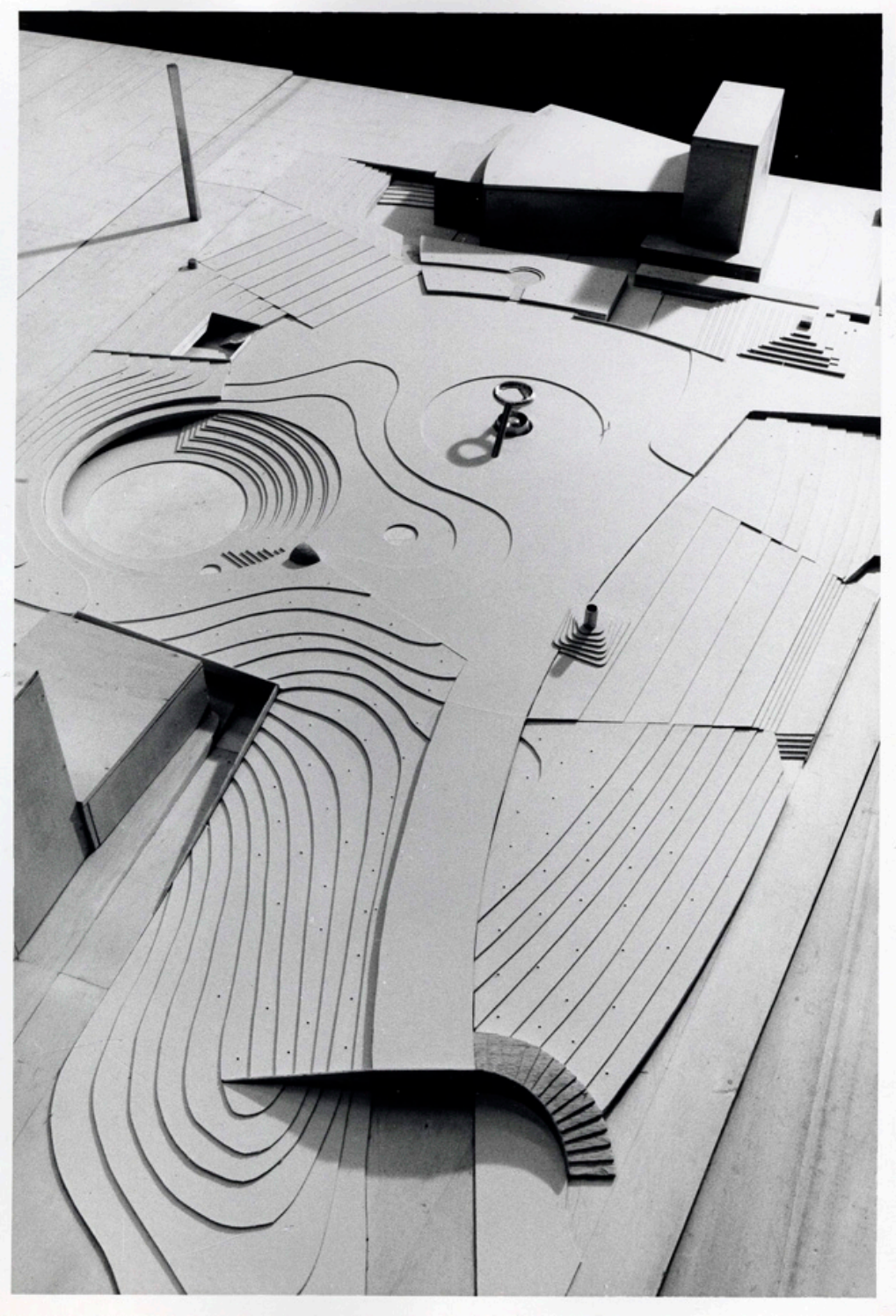


Figure 4. 1973 Detroit Plaza Model. Image courtesy of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.



Figure 5. Stepped granite installation north of the Dodge Fountain. Photograph by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.



Figure 6. Early model of Noguchi Site, 1973. Note the difference in the structure of the fountain and complexity of surrounding topographic elements. Image courtesy of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

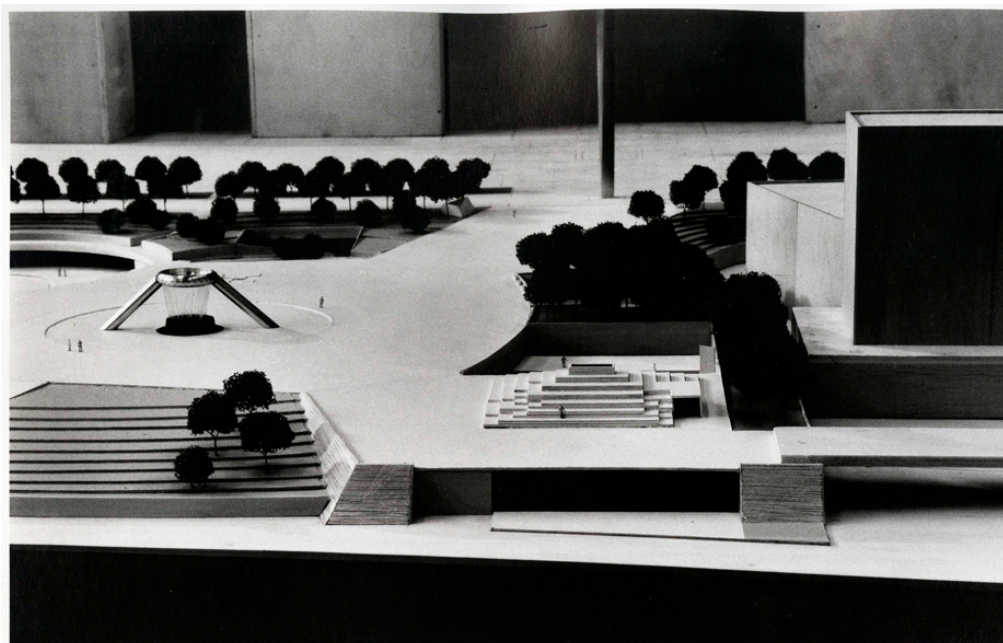


Figure 7. Alternate view of 1973 site model, looking from waterfront. Here you can see the elevation of the plaza and the scheme for the ziggurat. Image courtesy of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.



Figure 8. Isamu Noguchi Welding, ca. 1976. Noguchi was very involved with every detail of his plaza design, most notable in the computer programming for the fountain jets and the finishes of steel and granite installations. Image courtesy of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.



Figure 9. Fountain Construction, 1976. The completion of the Horace E. Dodge and Son Fountain was a great engineering achievement, local contractor John E. Green constructed the fountain with Noguchi overseeing his work. Image courtesy of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

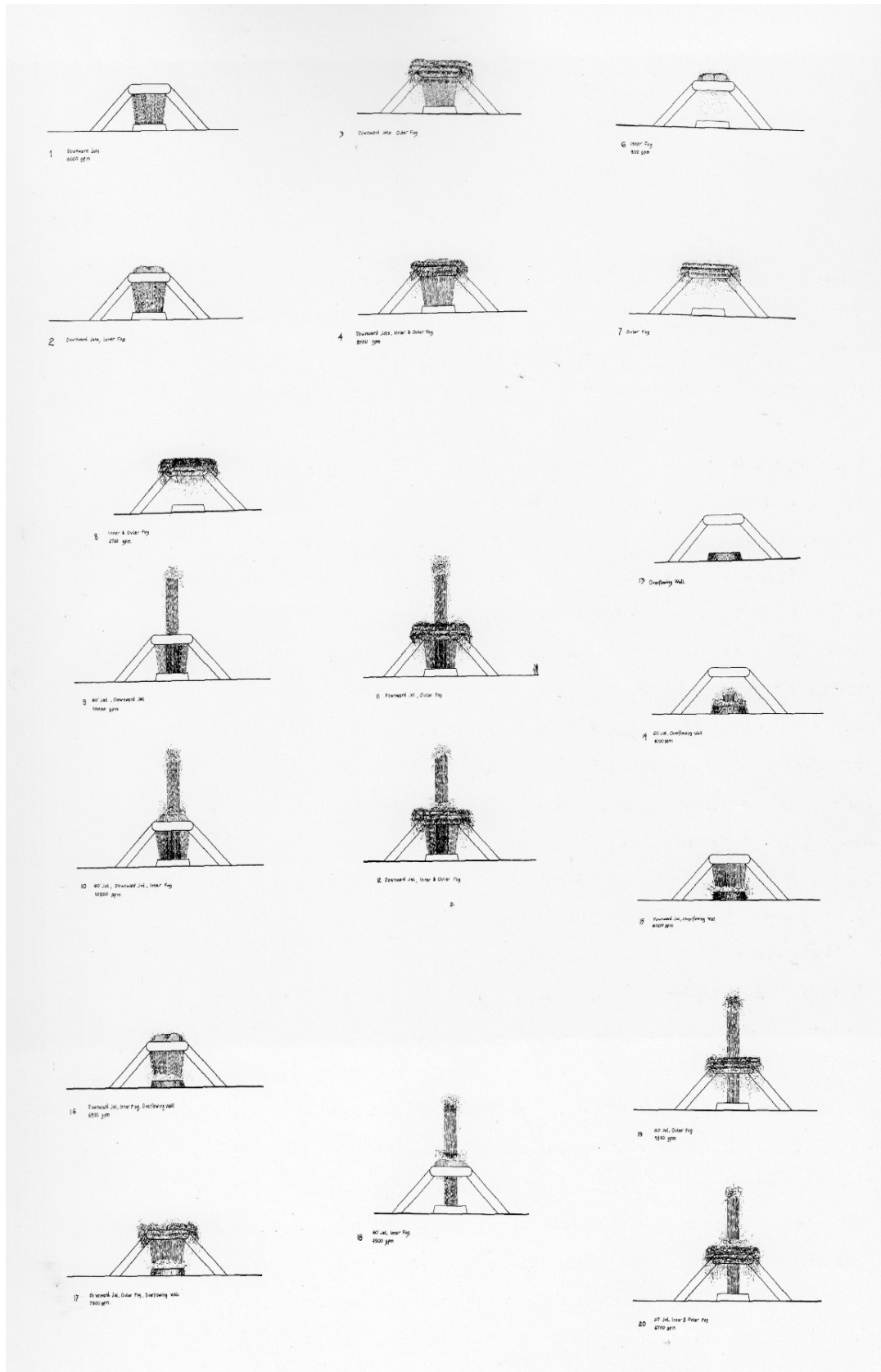


Figure 10. Sketch of Dodge fountain Water Play schemes.



Figure 11. Dodge Fountain, 1980. Photographer unknown. Image courtesy of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

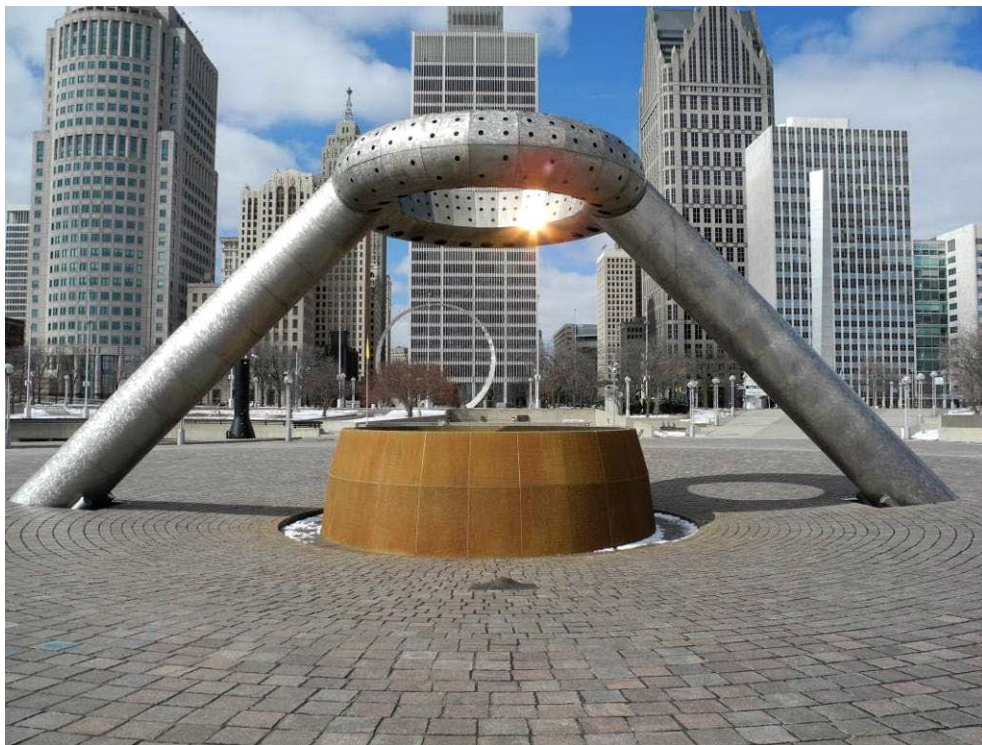


Figure 12. Dodge Fountain remains in good physical condition today. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.



Figure 13. Installation of Pylon. Date and Photographer Unknown. Image courtesy of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.



Figure 14. Noguchi's Pylon relates the park to the surrounding skyscrapers in the backdrop of downtown Detroit. Photograph by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.



Figure 15. Hart Plaza aerial view, date unknown. The plaza drew in crowds from its opening, largely due to active programming and the novelty of the city's latest addition by a world-renowned artist. Image courtesy of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.



Figure 16. Intrusive additions – Bulkheads, unapproved lamp installations and security equipment clutter the design of the upper portion of the plaza.



Figure 17. Cell phone antennae and security additions create a disruptive aesthetic rising from within a Noguchi element. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.



Figure 18. *Labor's Legacy: Transcending*. 2003. David Barr and Sergio De Giusti, 2003. This recent memorial creates a significant addition to Hart Plaza in a highly visible central location that distracts rather than contributes to the Noguchi plan. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.

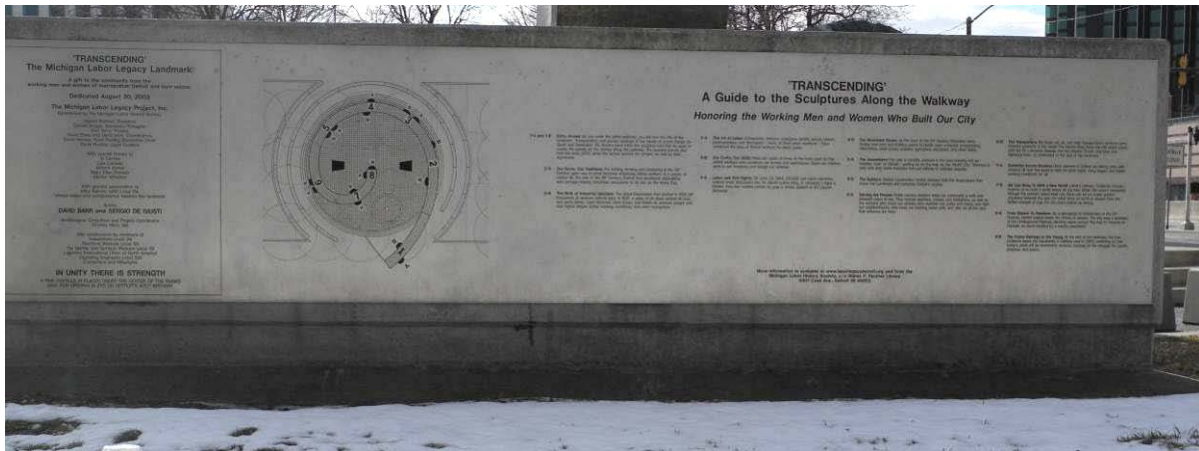


Figure 19. Plaque explaining the various elements of Transcending. Photo By Alexandra Kirby, 2013.

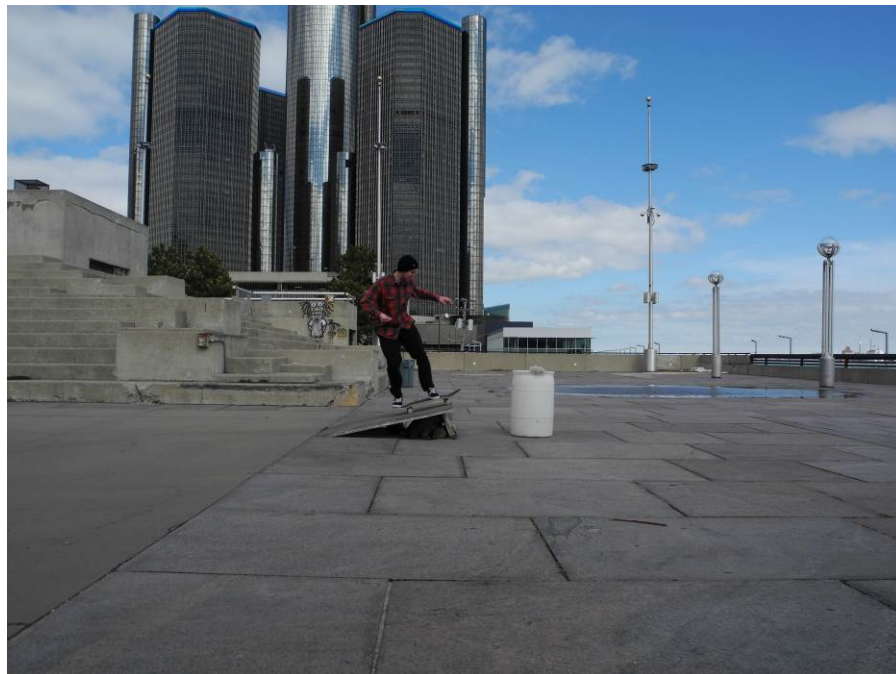


Figure 20. The park has become popular with the local skateboarding communities for its large, uninterrupted space. These skateboarders lifted a granite tile as a ramp for practicing jumps in front of the Ziggurat at the southeast edge of the plaza. This not only show a user group unanticipated by Noguchi, but the level of surveillance that the park is under. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.

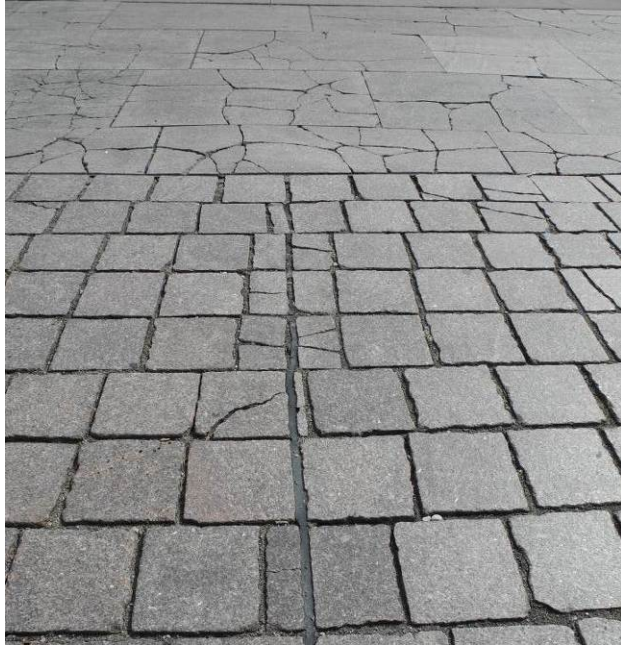


Figure 21. Both scales of granite tiles in disrepair – caulking has been used to replace cement grout in areas of deterioration. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.

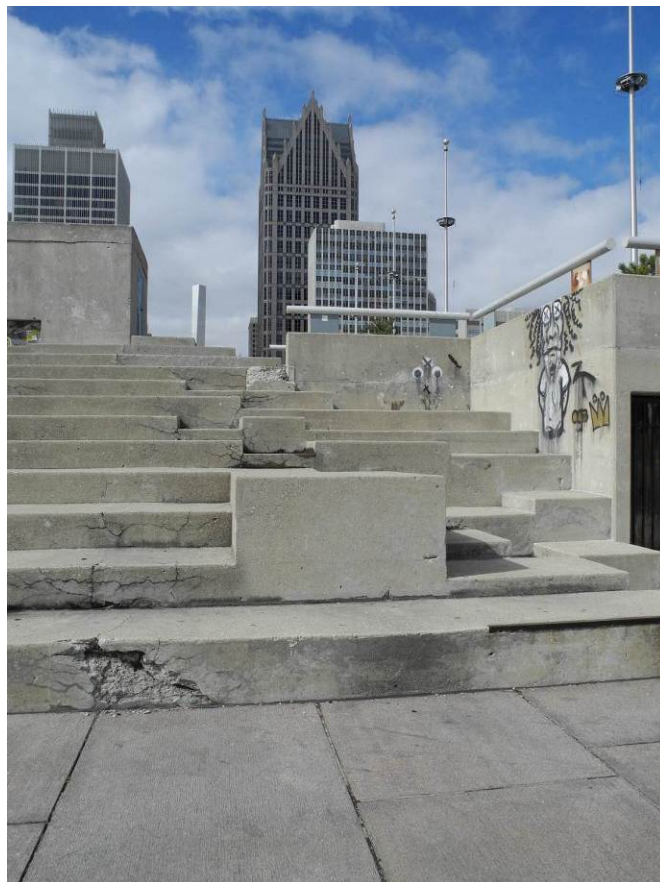


Figure 22. Deterioration and graffiti on the Ziggurat. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.



Figure 23. Map of Detroit People Mover route . Hart Plaza is outlined in black, with nearby stops at the Renaissance Center, Millander Center, and the Financial District. No signage in these stops recommends seeing Hart Plaza.
 Courtesy of www.detroitpeoplesmover.com.

Chapter Two: Bayfront Park, Miami

1980 - 1996

*When I do a park, I'm really doing sculpture that everybody can afford because it doesn't cost them anything to get into it.*⁴⁷

- Isamu Noguchi

History

Bayfront Park is located in the heart of Miami, directly east of the downtown bracketed by Biscayne Bay to the east and Biscayne Boulevard to the west. The Miami River runs south of the park while the Miami Marina anchors its north end. From 1896 through 1922, the land and much of what would become present day Miami was the property of Henry M. Flagler's Florida East Coast Railway. Miami's first public park, the Royal Palm Park, fronted Flagler's Royal Palm Hotel, on what was previously the water's edge. The space hosted sporting events as well as concerts and acted as an early civic space for the small yet rapidly growing city.

In 1922, the city purchased the waterfront land from the railway company for \$1.2 million.⁴⁸ In 1924, the Boston landscape architect Warren Henry Manning was commissioned by the city to design a passive park on a site of over 60 acres. The park saw numerous additions over time, including the reinstallation of the Royal Palm Park's band shell, a popular rock garden, and a Danish brigantine that acted as an aquarium.⁴⁹

In 1950, the architect Harold McNeil designed a new band shell and a year later a new library was constructed on park grounds at the foot of Flagler Street, downtown Miami's central artery. Because the library blocked views of the bay, a moratorium was placed on construction in

⁴⁷ Isamu Noguchi Interview with Kitty Roedel. August 13, 1986. File source: Projects: Miami, Florida, Bayfront Park, Amphitheater, 1980, 1986, 1987, Folder 12 of 24. Archives: Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

⁴⁸ Paul S. George. "Miami's Bayfront Park: A History."

<http://www.bayfrontparkmiami.com/pages/history/historyessay.html>. Accessed 2/25/2013.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

the park. The 1960s saw a steep decline in downtown retail activity, as residents moved to rapidly developing suburbs on the city's margins. Despite events programmed to attract the public, fewer visitors came to the park through the decade. In 1964, the city proposed a convention center to attract locals and tourists as part of a master plan drafted by the Greek planner Konstantinos Apostolos Doxiadis that was poorly received by the public (*fig. 1*). While voters rejected the design, the area surrounding the park continued to develop through the 1970s. During this period, the yacht harbor was converted to the Miami Marina, the port to Bicentennial Park, and a large commercial center, Bayside Market, was built. To the west, a number of high-rise hotels were designed throughout the 1970s and 80s, including the InterContinental by Pietro Belluschi (1982) on Chopin Plaza.

In 1978, following the opening of the Walker Art Museum's exhibition, *Imaginary Landscapes*, Noguchi was contacted by Kitty Roedel, the Director of Marketing at the Miami Development Authority. She had seen his designs for *Play Mountain* at the exhibition's showing in Denver, Colorado, and proposed that Noguchi look at an underused park running along Miami's Biscayne Bay in the downtown. Noguchi "proposed that the library there should be torn down and the site isolated by a berm for bleachers from which to watch the Orange Bowl Parade."⁵⁰ The space would become his largest American landscape design, covering twenty-eight acres and taking over a decade to complete.⁵¹ Noguchi and Roedel's dream for *Play Mountain* was never realized, but Noguchi did design the landscape containing two amphitheaters, a light tower, a massive fountain overlooking the bay, a marble slide sculpture

⁵⁰ Isamu Noguchi, *The Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum*. 190.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* Morenuma Park in Sapporo, Japan, was designed by Noguchi in 1988 and covers over 450 acres.

and a monument dedicated to the victims of the *Challenger* spacecraft (fig. 2,3).⁵² The park was not completed until 1996, nearly eight years after Noguchi's death, and at a cost of approximately \$40 million.

Design

In a letter to Kitty Roedel, Noguchi condemned developments surrounding Bayfront Park and explained that "Miami must have a totally new park because all the modern buildings have made the present facility incongruous."⁵³ Miami Mayor Maurice A. Ferré praised the Noguchi design at a 1980 City Commission meeting and expressed the city's good fortune to have an opportunity to work with an internationally renowned artist. Ferré claimed that a Bayfront Park renovation was "the right project, at the right time, in the right place."⁵⁴ At the meeting Noguchi's proposal, presented in a wood and plaster model, received strong support from the Miami Downtown Development Authority, Senator Claude Pepper, the Downtown Miami Business Association, the Cultural Executive Council and the Greater Miami Hotel and Motel Association, among other community members. This support reflected the sentiment of local merchants and community leaders that downtown Miami was in need of a new image to rise above the 1970s recession and gain a greater appeal to those who had fled to the region's rapidly growing suburbs.

⁵² The slide sculpture, Slide mantra, and the Challenger Memorial were later additions to the park design, added by Noguchi.

⁵³ Letter from Isamu Noguchi to Kitty Roedel. August 27, 1979. File source: Projects: Miami, Florida, Bayfront Park, 1981, Folder 1 of 24. Archives: Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

⁵⁴ Minutes of Regular Meeting of the City Commission of Miami, Florida. July 24, 1980. File Source: Projects: Miami, Florida, Bayfront Park, Contracts. 1980 – 1982. Folder 11 of 24. Archives: Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

Noguchi wanted to see the park renovated to act as a “village green,” where people could congregate and interact rather than a private green space to escape from the stress of the city.⁵⁵ His design acknowledged the existing layout of Bayfront Park, the central axis of which aligned with Flagler Street, which the library once intersected, a waterfront promenade and a circular core, previously a garden located near Biscayne Boulevard (*fig. 4*). Today this is represented by Noguchi’s centerpiece, the Mildred and Claude Pepper Fountain, named after the U.S. senator and his wife, benefactors of the park. South of the central promenade, where the former amphitheater once stood, Noguchi created a small pavilion with a berm that the overlooking benches ascend, offering a grassy hillside for additional seating. At the apex of the hill, a white wall screens the pavilion from the high-rises that lie behind it. On the far side of the hill, at the corner of Biscayne Boulevard and Chopin Plaza, Noguchi’s *Challenger* Memorial rises from a triangular platform set into an elevated section of grass with shrubs flanking either edge of the monument base.

North of the Flagler Street axis, the park had previously offered a series of meandering paths with large open spaces for recreation. There is no record of plantings prior to the Noguchi plan; however, the city had invested one million dollars in a beautification project that added intensive new landscaping and planted new trees.⁵⁶ Noguchi located a 10,000-seat amphitheater at the north end of the park, ensuring a closer relationship with the venue and new Bayside Market to the immediate north. Along Biscayne Boulevard, he designed a rock garden, noting the popularity of the previous one located along the waterfront south of the central axis. South of the new amphitheater, the artist placed a cylindrical light tower – a modern abstraction of a

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Paul S. George. “Miami’s Bayfront Park: A History.”

<http://www.bayfrontparkmiami.com/pages/history/historyessay.html>. Accessed 2/25/2013

lighthouse that bounced colored lights off the surrounding architecture – located on a hilltop overlooking Biscayne Boulevard to the west and the amphitheater to the northeast (*fig. 3*).

Pathways were made wider and more direct, but foot traffic was still welcome to traverse the open green spaces, with native vegetation and trees for shade. Along the waterfront, a broad promenade evokes the *paseos* of Spain and Latin America, lined with custom-designed concrete benches, and profits from the panoramic view of the bayside and city center. This space was also ideal for accommodating pedestrians during large events. The final element of Noguchi's design, which followed the preliminary plans, was his elegant *Slide Mantra*. This sculpture welcomes visitors from the Flagler street entrance, fully accessible to both children and adults.

Noguchi again collaborated with Shoji Sadao and the local landscape architect Lester Pancoast, a Miami native, to develop the designs and manage general permitting and licensed work. Funding for the project was secured from a number of federal, state and local agencies, including the local Development Authority, ten million dollars from the City of Miami, funding from the Army Corp of Engineers, and private donations.

Due to financial issues, construction didn't begin until 1985, following the demolition of the library. On April 24, 1988, the amphitheater opened, celebrated as a partial opening of the incomplete park. Following a ribbon-cutting ceremony, the New World Symphony performed an inaugural concert. Miami City Commissioner Rosario Kennedy foresaw the park as "the hub for cultural activity in Greater Miami well into the next century."⁵⁷ Bayfront Park opened with a three day celebration of the long-awaited public space, still only partially complete, despite its having already cost approximately \$30 million (*fig. 5,6*).

⁵⁷ Luisa Yanez, "Theater to Open in Park Renovation Renews Bayfront Park." *Sun Sentinel*. April 7, 1988. 10B

The Claude and Mildred Pepper Fountain

Like his project in Detroit, Noguchi used a fountain to create a spectacle to draw people from the busy streets adjacent to the park, and to engage the public with both his work and the waterfront itself. The Claude and Mildred Pepper Fountain is constructed of concrete with a two-inch granite veneer formed in a conical base and set into a broad and shallow concrete basin. “Mildred & Claude Pepper Fountain” is engraved at the base of the fountain, facing west to the park entrance. A steel fence was installed for security (*fig. 7*).⁵⁸

In his design specifications, Noguchi listed the following directions for the “Sea Fountain” flow:⁵⁹

1. *Entire basin is filled and still.*
2. *Outer rim flows centrifugally. Its effect controlled by water pressure. This is almost continuous.*
3. *Upward jets are introduced with turbulence like seawaves and increasing waterflow over rim.*
4. *Central drain is opened causing upward jets to rise gradually to full height as desired.*
5. *When the central drain is closed, jets decrease in height to sea waves as basin fills with water from jets.*
6. *The inward spiral may be maintained by controlling upward jets. Thus there would be two factors for control.*
7. *The drain at the base of fountain is an integral part of the fountain operation. Normally there is no water visible in the red sandstone catch basin, which is only filled occasionally.*
8. *The fog jets on the exterior rim of the fountain must be synchronized with the rest of the water display*
9. *The fog is lighted as is the centrifugal spray by eighteen lights within the drain.*

⁵⁸ Date unknown. Interview with Timothy Schmand, Bayfront Park Management Trust President and CEO, 2/27/2013.

⁵⁹ “Sea Fountain,” no date. . File Source: Projects: Miami, Florida, Bayfront Park, Contracts. 1981 – 1988. Folder 14 of 24. Archives: Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

Much like the Dodge Fountain, Noguchi wanted this work to demonstrate advanced technology and employed a computerized system to spout water in dramatic plumes, dying down to a gentle wave – not unlike the waters of the bay just beyond the sculpture.

Today, more intense security fencing surrounds the fountain, creating a distinct barrier and an unwelcoming air (*fig. 8*). The basin was painted rust red, as a response to graffiti and other defacements. The stone of the fountain is rust-stained, a debatably pleasant aesthetic, but likely a sign of interior plumbing issues. The electricity required to run the complex programmed fountain sequence has proven to be an ongoing financial burden, limiting the hours of operation. When the fountain is off it acts as a resting spot for coastal birds. In 1992 Hurricane Andrew severely damaged the fountain and water tank and FEMA and the Claude Pepper Foundation granted significant funds to repair the piece. The new funds did not reproduce the original spray program and the current pattern is much less dramatic. Additionally, the underground tank that supplies the water is located directly beneath the fountain and is threatened by rising tides and salt erosion. In 2007, the park introduced the Miami SkyLift – a large balloon that lifted visitors 500 feet into the air above the Pepper Fountain for panoramic views of the city and bay. This attraction required support by cylindrical concrete piers set into the fountain basin. The profitability of the installation did not meet the intended income and the SkyLift was removed. The piers remain however, visually distracting from Noguchi's original design.

Although the fountain was intended to act as the focal point of the park, current maintenance has lessened its overall effect and it is now isolated in the center of an uninviting plaza with limited seating and few reasons to admire Noguchi's design. While costs had previously prohibited the constant running of the Pepper Fountain, today it runs daily from 7:00

a.m. through midnight, weather permitting.⁶⁰ This is certainly a programmatic improvement; however the fountain constitutes 65% of the park's electrical costs and the computerized fountain spray patterns pale in comparison to their former spectacle. Rather than the complex array of alternating spray patterns, a single jet of water shoots into the air from the fountain center, and the basin remains full, allowing water to cascade over the granite rim.

Slide Mantra

In 1966 Noguchi designed a spiral slide of marble, incorporating his common interest in play and sculpture. This model would be realized at full scale in 1986, when Noguchi represented the United States at the Venice Biennale (*fig. 9*). The slide was constructed of white Carrara marble, to honor its original location in Italy, pieced together from eight slabs, that totaled sixty tons and stood over ten feet high.⁶¹ The slide's elegant form allows the user to enter through a small entrance onto a spiral staircase that winds to an upper platform. The slide spirals downward around the interior staircase. Following the Biennale in 1987, the sculpture was installed at Bayfront Park, which had yet to open. In discussing the designs Noguchi explains that "here the tactile quality of sculpture is paramount – a chance for people to slide!"⁶² The slide is surrounded by a ring of sand, and to the edge of this a plaque is posted on a marble pedestal commemorating Noguchi and his contribution to the 1986 Venice Biennale American Pavilion.

A grove of palms trees surrounds the slide at the front entrance to the park (*fig. 10*). The slide remains in impressive condition considering the graffiti culture of Miami, but in places

⁶⁰ According to the president of the BPMT. The fountain was not on during my visit.

⁶¹ Noguchi, *The Isamu Noguchi Garden*. 106.

⁶² Noguchi, *The Isamu Noguchi Garden*. 107. A similar slide, sculpted of black gabbro, is located in Odori Park, Sapporo, Japan.

repeated cleanings have worn the smooth surface of the marble and caused rusty discoloration. The slide remains accessible to and in use by the public.

Klipsch Amphitheater

Historically, downtown Miami functioned as an entertainment hub – consider the Palm Royal band shell and the post-war stage that hosted Cesar LaMonaca several times a week before the magnetism of the downtown faded. Noguchi understood this historic significance and honored the tradition, designing a large amphitheater that covered approximately one-third of the park’s northern edge. The seating of the amphitheater is designed to look both at the central stage as well as the Biscayne Bay.

The theater opened in April, 1988, as part of the partial opening of the park and has been well used through the years. In 2008, Live Nation Entertainment, an international entertainment agency entered into a contract with the Bayfront Park Management Trust to operate, manage, and exclusively book the facility following its structural upgrade.⁶³ Alterations included replacing all seating, improving concession areas and upgrading the stage; these did not significantly affect Noguchi’s overall design.

Tina Hills Pavilion

The Tina Hills Pavilion – named after journalist and publisher of the Puerto Rican newspaper, *El Mundo*, and park benefactor, Argentina “Tina” Schifano Ramos Hills – is a smaller open air theater located to the south of the Klipsch Amphitheater (*fig. 11*). The pavilion provides 200 fixed seats and accommodates up to 800 on its lawn. The benches are built into the

⁶³ Live Nation Press release, July 2009. http://www.bayfrontparkmiami.com/media/livenat_bayfrontopening.pdf. Accessed March 1, 2013.

hillside facing the stage, and offer beautiful views of the bay. The pavilion is essentially a concrete slab elevated approximately two feet above the surrounding lawn. A steel frame supports a temporary canvas canopy to shade the pavilion. At the apex of the hill, a white concrete wall blocks noise from the busy intersection directly behind it. The pavilion is currently used for free yoga courses three times per week and two free weekend concerts every month, sponsored in collaboration with the Downtown Development Authority. The space is often rented for conferences, receptions and corporate events.

Mrs. Hills and her husband, Lee, executive editor of both the *Miami Herald* and *Detroit Free Press*, provided funding for an original Noguchi playground in the park, intending to produce a design similar to Noguchi's *Playscapes* in Atlanta. Sadly, the project was continually deferred and, when designs were ready, they did not meet ADA regulations. The play space was never realized. Instead, funds were used to create the present Lee and Tina Hills Playground (*fig. 12*), a standard prefabricated and pre-insured design, reflecting exactly the type of playground Noguchi actively rejected.

Challenger Memorial

On January 28, 1986, seven astronauts perished during the launch of the Shuttle *Challenger* at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. Noguchi, who was greatly inspired by technology, science, and space travel, commemorated the lives lost in the tragedy in his *Challenger Memorial*, set at the southwest corner of the park. He stated that “the park is a prototype or an image of the future world. It is America’s image that is so appealing. The

Challenger had that appealing quality of the opening up of science and space and so on. There is a human element of heroism and of hope.”⁶⁴

The one-hundred-foot high steel sculpture, painted white, twists upward in a triple helix. The intertwined forms allude to the helix of human DNA and the contrails of the fated shuttle. In front of the statue, facing the intersection of Biscayne Boulevard and Chopin Plaza, a triangular granite tablet engraved with a poem written by San Francisco-based poet, Michael McClure:

*O
Ivory
Cinder
Open Petals
Soar the Space Path
Flesh Spirits Heroes
McAuliffe Onizuka Jarvis
McNair Smith Resnik Scobee*

Local school children financed the sculpture through fund-raising efforts, raising \$65,000 and an additional \$60,000 donated from local construction companies. The memorial was dedicated on January 28, 1988, two years after the disaster, when it was unveiled by a group of children and commemorated by Captain James Lovell, who had flown on the Gemini and Apollo programs.

Current Context

The Bayfront Park Management Trust (BPMT), a financially independent city-run agency, is charged with tending to the park. The Trust was founded in 1987 by Miami’s City Commission, designed to orchestrate maximum community participation within Bayfront Park

⁶⁴ Isamu Noguchi Interview with Kitty Roedel. August 13, 1986. File source: Projects: Miami, Florida, Bayfront Park, Amphitheater, 1980, 1986, 1987, Folder 12 of 24. Archives: Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

and its neighboring Centennial Park, located to the north, past the American Airlines Marina. The purview of the BPMT includes maintenance, marketing and promotion, programming, development and management of revenue sources, coordination with Bayside Marketplace and the Oversight Committee, security, capital improvements and utilities.⁶⁵ The BPMT currently has approximate annual expenses of \$2.3 million, which is supported in part by a contract with Live Nation, in addition to income from other large-scale public events such as the Ultra Music Festival and marathons.⁶⁶

Integrity

The park has undergone numerous changes since its original conception in the 1980s. The BPMT has in recent years invested approximately one million dollars in planting trees to create a more expansive shade canopy from the tropical sun.⁶⁷ The Noguchi-designed public furniture was deemed uncomfortable and promenade benches, previously made of cast concrete, were replaced with traditional green rubber-coated park benches (*fig. 13*). The addition of the Lee and Tina Hills Playground (2007) and nearby aquatic play sculpture (*fig. 14*) are incongruous to the overall design and in no way reflect the elegance or imaginative styling of Noguchi's play spaces. The park's current condition is not fully compatible with Noguchi's original intentions; however, his sculptural pieces are well maintained despite issues with graffiti, skateboarding and technological concerns surrounding the fountain and unused lighthouse.

⁶⁵ Report to the Miami City Commission on Bayfront Park as Presented by the Ad Hoc Committee. June 26, 1986. File Source: Projects: Miami, Florida, Bayfront Park, Contracts. 1985 – 1986. Folder 8 of 24. Archives: Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

⁶⁶ Interview with Timothy Schmand, Bayfront Park Management Trust President and CEO, 2/27/2013. Schmand explained park maintenance makes up 45% of annual costs.

⁶⁷ Interview with Timothy Schmand, Bayfront Park Management Trust President and CEO, 2/27/2013. Planting schedules and species lists were not available.

Due to an unusually extended construction period, Noguchi was unable to see Bayfront Park completed, and left the unfinished work to his associate, Shoji Sadao. Because of this Noguchi's standard process of the gradual evolution of his works, by which fine details were left to be polished at their time of completion was cut short. Bayfront Park saw many alterations during the long design process, such as the addition of the *Slide Mantra* and *Challenger Memorial*, now understood as critical elements of the complete design. Additionally, numerous historic monuments were required to remain in the park and more have been added since its completion. These include the Dade County War memorial (1943, rededicated 1990); a ten-foot tall bronze statue of Julia Sturtevant Tuttle, "Mother of Miami," (2010); A Bronze statue of park benefactor Claude D. Pepper (1989); the Miami Centennial Time Capsule (1996); and rotating statues from a private collector, presently Male Torso by Fernand Botero (1992, installed 2012), facing Biscayne Boulevard at Southeast First Street. These additions create a disjointed experience within the park, which Noguchi designed as a coherent and aesthetically consistent experience with unique moments that spark the imagination. Instead, his sculpture, Bayfront Park, has faded into a generic public park, difficult to discern from many others aside from what has become a small collection of individual Noguchi pieces. The relationships have faded and the character significantly dampened.

Preservation Recommendations

As previously stated, Miami offers nearly year-round pleasant weather and spectacular views of the city's diverse architecture and scenic waterfront.⁶⁸ While Bayfront Park is in

⁶⁸ Bayfront Park is centrally located in Miami and connected to the city by four mass transit modes – eight bus lines, the Metro Rail, a trolley line and the Downtown Metromover – as well as Interstates 95 and 395, and three state highways. Ample street parking is located along the center of Biscayne Boulevard, and multilevel parking garages

generally good condition, in active use, and a safe public space, there are a number of measures the Bayfront Park Management Trust could take to improve the overall conditions of the park as well as a sense of community pride and understanding about the park and its artistic significance, listed below. Bayfront Park is fortunate to have an organization run by a local government agency entirely dedicated to its care and programming, but as discussed above, some issues remain regarding the park's maintenance, integrity and most importantly community perception and investment. Programming at Bayfront Park seems largely successful and well managed, likely because it is the primary source of funding for the BPMT. These are intended to expand the stakeholder community for the park and increase general public understanding of the park as a holistic sculptural design.

Activation

- In many ways, Downtown Miami turns its back on Bayfront Park, with little inviting pedestrian activity on the street front, especially along Biscayne Boulevard. By creating stronger pedestrian connections across Biscayne Boulevard, an eight-lane thoroughfare with a broad median used for parking, visitors and local workers would have safer and more inviting access to the park.
- Similarly, Bayside Marketplace, along the Marina immediately north of the park, faces away from Bayfront Park. Here, both visual and physical connections would invite shoppers with an opportunity to enjoy the greenery and artistic elegance of the park.
- Restore the Noguchi Light Tower above the Klipsch Amphitheater. By bringing back the historic lightshow before musical performances and during other nighttime events in the park, the public could be drawn in as Noguchi had originally intended.

to the north at the Bayside Markets and west in the downtown center. This makes the park easily accessible by various modes of transit for a wide array of visitors.

- Initiate a volunteer program for community clean up after large events and establish a hotline to report issues and concerns directly with the Trust.
- Noguchi promoted business and concessions within Bayfront Park as well as his design for Detroit’s Hart Plaza. Today food truck culture is extremely popular in Miami, predominantly in the Wynwood District two miles north of Downtown. BPMT has already begun inviting a number of these local businesses to operate in the park on weekday afternoons to invite the local workforce to enjoy the park and a diverse selection of foods. This could be highlighted in weekend events with a monthly “food in the park” event, inviting a larger audience to enjoy the park.

Education

- Provide greater public access to the history and design of the park, highlighting the importance of the park as a critical work by a well-known artist and a landmark for the city of Miami.
- The park should be highlighted in local tourist guides and brochures as not only an open greenspace, but as a large scale art work designed by a prominent American artist. There are nine high rise hotels within one-thousand feet of the park and dozens more in the Downtown and Financial District that would benefit from a knowledgeable staff and informative materials for their customers, highlighting Miami’s largest artwork.
- There are three plaques honoring Noguchi’s contributions to Bayfront Park – One at the southwest entrance, commemorating Noguchi’s “vision and perseverance” in making the “redevelopment of Bayfront Park... [as] a symbol of the rejuvenation of the downtown area and City of Miami,” a second acknowledging his design of the *Slide Mantra* at the central entrance facing Flagler Street, and a third on the *Challenger* memorial. I propose creating a map that highlights each of Noguchi’s elements within the park that would be available on the Bayfront Park Management Trust’s website, at primary entrances of the park, and available in print for tourists and park visitors at nearby hotels and businesses.

Restoration

- Horticultural plans of Lester Pancost and Noguchi should be revisited to return to original planting schemes. A number of generic hedges and other plantings appear to be inconsistent with previous Noguchi designs and make much of the park feel common and standardized.
- Much of the grass cover has been well maintained, but lower areas are subject to flooding, limiting access for children's play and open seating areas.
- Granite plaza tiles should be replaced in kind in main promenade from Flagler Street to the waterfront (*fig. 15*). For longevity, it would be beneficial to install a new foundation for promenades during low traffic months as tiles are clearly cracking from insufficient support below.
- Piers from the SkyLift around the Pepper fountain should be removed as their visual impact on the fountain is highly detrimental.
- Remove the paint in the concrete basin of Pepper Fountain to restore the previous light gray color. The rust accumulation on the fountain granite would likely be approved by Noguchi, who often wrote about his appreciation of the weathering and aging of materials.
- Replace standardized public furniture – benches, garbage cans and bike racks – with concrete benches similar to Noguchi's original designs or inspired by his designs at other locations. The existing benches are incompatible with Noguchi's original design in color and form and continue the ongoing pattern of homogenizing the park.
- Develop a fund dedicated to the creation of a new, thoughtfully designed playground. Working with Noguchi's numerous models and plans, develop America's second Noguchi or Noguchi-inspired playground with local artists and designers.

Unlike Philip Hart Plaza, Bayfront Park has a less legible design character, due to its immense scale, fidelity to the previous park designs, and to Noguchi's design approach. Noguchi's plan evolved over time, and the artist made unanticipated additions of *Slide Mantra* and the *Challenger* memorial. Additionally, he played into elements of the prior park, relying on extant axes and motifs, making the design less of a Noguchi and more a public work. Many of Noguchi's decisions in design revisions were heavily influenced by public input and civic need, which limited the artist's vision for the park. Because of this, the design is perhaps less vulnerable as the integrity was challenged even in the conception of the project. The best measure the BPMT can take to safeguard Noguchi's presence in the park to continue protection and maintenance of the individual sculptural elements – the Pepper Fountain, *Slide Mantra*, the *Challenger* memorial, and remaining Noguchi furnishings. Miami's appreciation for the arts will likely bolster this protection, particularly through additional educational outreach.

Illustrations



Figure 1. 1967 Doxiadis Plan Model for Miami waterfront. "Doxiadis Model Shows Proposed Convention Center as Viewed From Bay." *The Miami News*, November 2, 1967.

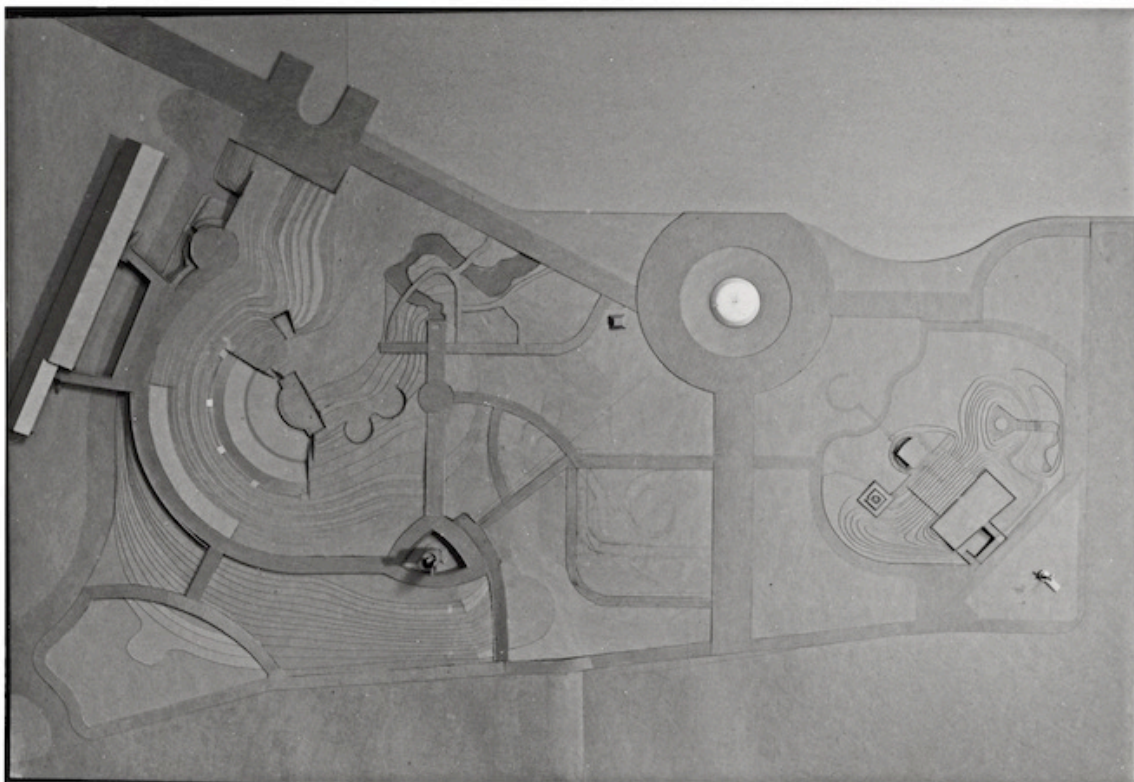


Figure 2. Date Unknown. Model for Bayfront Park, Miami. Courtesy of The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.



Figure 3. Present aerial of Bayfront Park, Courtesy of Google Maps, Map data 2013, Sanborn. All Noguchi Elements are highlighted in green. Map data: Google maps, 2013.

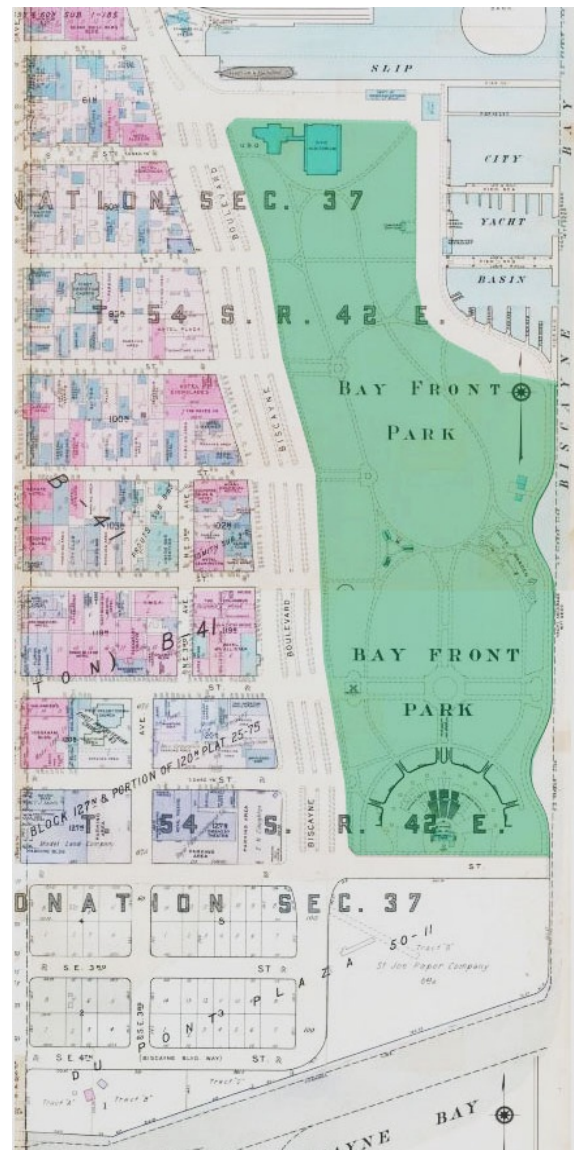


Figure 4. G.M. Hopkins Co. Insurance Map, 1947, Revised 1949. Florida, Miami. Volume 1, Plates 1 and 2. Courtesy of Historic Map Works. 1947 foot print of Bayfront Park is highlighted in green.



Figure 5. 1985, Bayfront Park under construction with views of Dodge Island. Image courtesy of The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.



Figure 6. Aerial image of Bayfront Park, 1992. Courtesy of The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.



Figure 7. 1992, Claude and Mildred Pepper Fountain. Courtesy of The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

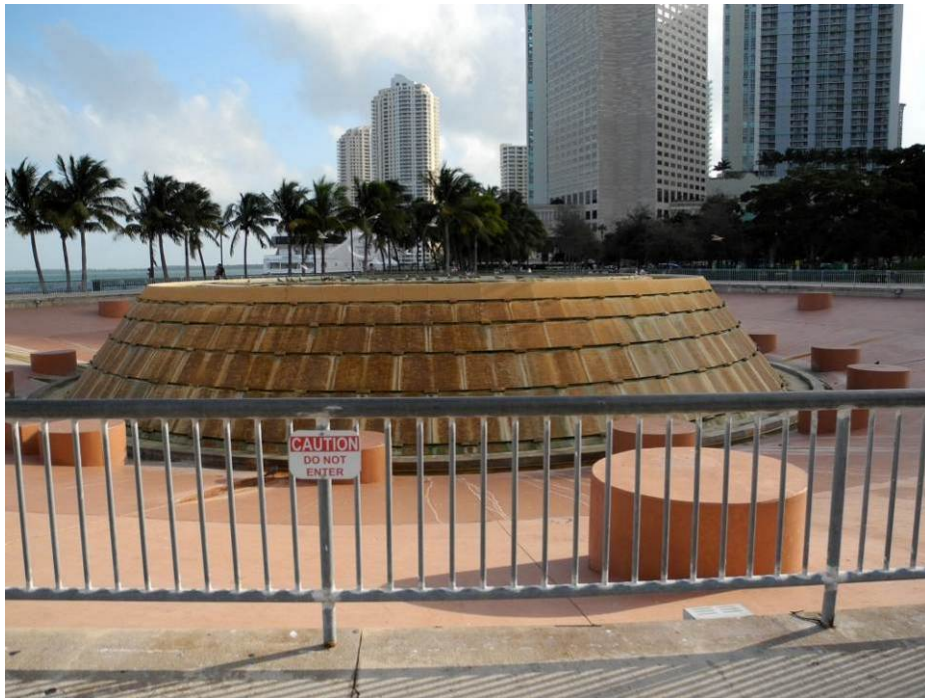


Figure 8. Mildred and Claude Pepper Fountain. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.



Figure 9. *Slide Mantra* in its original context, 1986 Venice Biennale. Courtesy of The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.



Figure 10. *Slide Mantra* today. Note discoloration on right wall. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.



Figure 11. Tina Hills Pavilion. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.



Figure 12. Lee and Tina hills Children's Play Area, constructed 2007. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.



Figure 13. New park benches, garbage cans and bike racks have been installed for public comfort. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.



Figure 14. Aquatic play sculpture. Artist and date unknown. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.



Figure 15. Poor repairs of granite with concrete and incorrect finish. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.

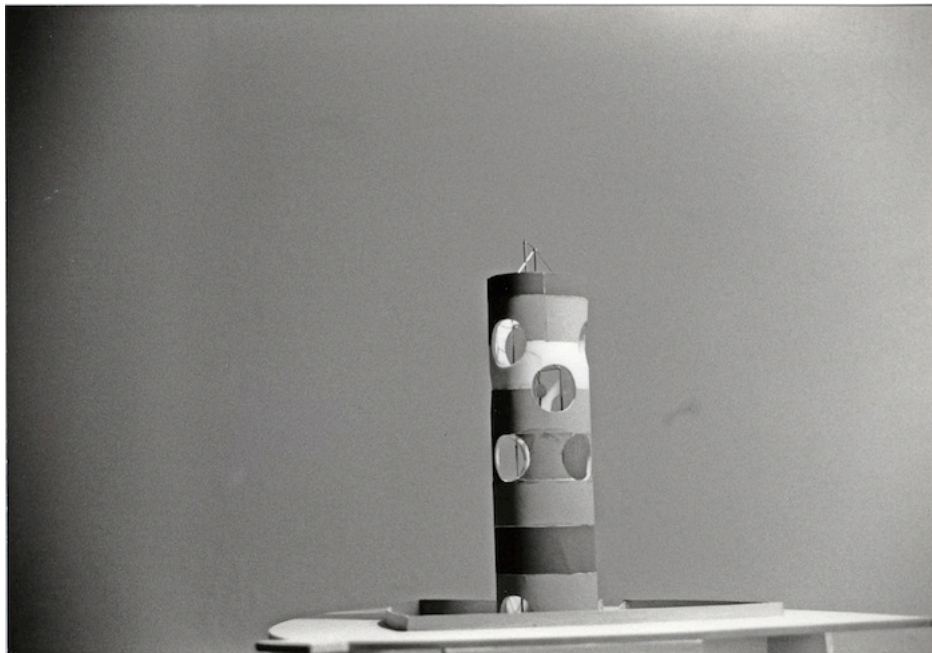


Figure 16. Model for Light Tower. Courtesy of The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.



Figure 17. 1992, Challenger Memorial. Courtesy of The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

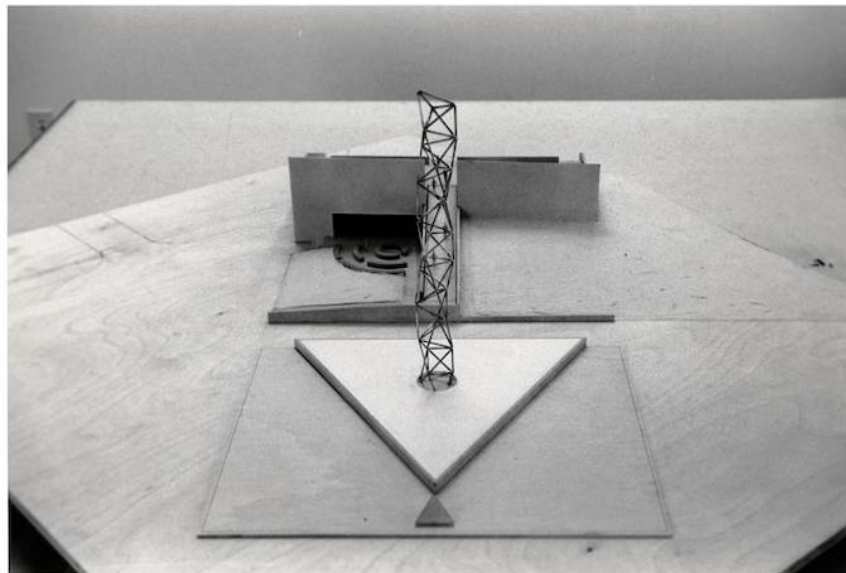


Figure18. Model for Challenger Memorial. Courtesy of The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

**Japanese-American Cultural and Community Center, Los Angeles,
California
1980 - 1983**

*L.A. is like a place you have up your sleeve. It used to be a place where
people retired. I am not retiring; I am just passing through here.*

-Isamu Noguchi

History

In 1980, The Japanese American Community Center (JACCC) was granted funds by the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) of Los Angeles to develop a half-acre plaza as an entryway to the Japanese-American Cultural and Community Center Building and the JACCC Theater. The site is bounded by Azusa and Second Street to the North, San Pedro Street to the west, and the JACCC structures to the east and south, respectively (*fig. 1*). The purpose for the plaza was to “facilitate diverse cultural, community needs and to encourage interaction amongst the residents...” of the surrounding neighborhood known as Little Tokyo, to be located in what was previously a parking lot for nearby businesses (*fig. 2*).⁶⁹ In the CRA objectives, a list of minimal criteria was set forth, including a “major sculptural element,” which the Friends of Little Tokyo Arts (FOLTA) offered to fund.⁷⁰ In his interviews and writings on the space, Noguchi repeatedly noted that while his sculptural pieces secured his invitation as the plaza’s designer, the entire plaza acted as a sculpture, expanding beyond central element to draw people into the space.

⁶⁹ Japanese American Cultural and Community Center Plaza. Community Redevelopment Agency Objective and Budget. January 19, 1980. File Source: Projects: Los Angeles: JACCC, Contracts – unsigned, Folder 3 of 4. Source: Archives of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Originally, Isamu Noguchi was invited by FOLTA in 1978 to design a sculptural piece for a large passageway in the proposed open space between the existing community center and a planned theater, school, and gym— a gesture welcoming Noguchi’s cultural presence in the city where he had been born, by a community for which he had defiantly defended the rights of during his internment in Poston. Noguchi insisted that the planned orientation of the site be modified, expanding the available space by moving the proposed gym to a new site and re-orienting the theater and elevating the plaza. He saw this as a way for the site to become an active core for Little Tokyo, by providing a spacious plaza for ceremonies and assemblies rather than only a transitional space. Due to his innovative approach, Noguchi, who had recently completed Hart Plaza, was offered the commission for the entire plaza design to activate the sculpture he would be contributing. His proposal was accepted by the CRA and JACCC in 1980 and he was granted an entire acre to design at the entrance of the JACCC Building. The construction of the plaza was funded by the CRA Cultural Arts Program, a percent for arts policy that requires redevelopment sites to dedicate 1% of development costs to a permanent art piece, and the sculpture was funded by FOLTA.⁷¹

Like his earlier commission in Detroit, Noguchi worked with the architectural firm of Fuller and Sadao, appointing Shoji Sadao as a primary contact for all communication and direction over the work. Because construction of the surrounding theater and commercial structures was delayed, ground breaking for the plaza did not

⁷¹ FOLTA raised \$200,000 from contributions by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Atlantic Richfield Foundation, Lloyd E. Rigler, and Lawrence E. Deutsch for the Sculpture following Noguchi’s commission. Suzanne Munich, “Noguchi Sculpture for Little Tokyo,” *Los Angeles Times*. December 30, 1980.

begin until mid-1981, although it had originally been slated to open on the City Centennial, and the space was not dedicated until July of 1983 (*fig. 3*).

The Japanese-American Cultural Center was created as a resource for the nearly 170,000 Los Angeles residents of Japanese ancestry to preserve a connection to their cultural heritage as succeeding generations lost touch with the traditions of their ancestors, and it remains the nation's largest Asian-American community center. The *Issei*, first generation immigrants, had suffered from significant racism and segregation throughout the nineteenth century; practices Noguchi himself had witnessed as an ostracized child of mixed-ethnicity and during his time with the *Nisei*, second generation Japanese, in the Poston internment camp in 1942. Little Tokyo, the surrounding area, was experiencing a wholesale community redevelopment effort that supported the Japanese-run businesses supplying the community with goods and services that were difficult to find in the American market but pivotal in the preservation of their ethnic identity. More importantly, the neighborhood offered a space of safety and familiarity, where cultural events and gatherings could take place. FOLTA could not have chosen a more appropriate designer for the sculptural element to link the commercial section of Little Tokyo to the community center, as Noguchi, then 76 years old, had spent his entire life walking the delicate line between his American and Japanese identities, bringing a profound and personal understanding of both cultures and the conflicts that exist between them. At the opening of the plaza on July 26, 1983, local officials and representatives of the Japanese community celebrated Noguchi's new space and it was blessed in a Shinto ceremony, a balance of eastern and western observances.

Design

*You can read all kinds of symbology into the design if you want to. The Japanese are crazy about wet rocks. The fan shape has great significance, but the main thing is the shape – it will be an area for community use.*⁷²

-Isamu Noguchi

The JACCC Plaza consists of two primary elements, a central elevated sculpture, and marginal fountain, grounded in a site plan that accentuates their importance (*fig. 4*). The monochromatic plaza is paved entirely with red brick, with a thin mortar joint. In the heart of the plaza, the sculpture *To the Issei* consists of two twelve-foot Japanese basalt monoliths that stand atop a fan-shaped platform that separates the space from the walkway immediately behind it (*fig. 6*). On the northern and western edges of the plaza, terraced steps are set at varying elevations, so that onlookers at large gatherings have clear views of activities in the center of the plaza. On quiet days, the steps provide seating. Seven small planters are set into the brick at the northern edge, each with different Japanese tree species, and in the eastern corner a grove of eucalyptus was planted in white gravel.⁷³ These northern terraces also provide a diversity of seating options in an elevated brick square and circle rising from the foundation. The western stretch hosts a grove of Japanese maples, providing midday shade, and a fountain – the second focal element of the plaza – is nestled alongside the west entry stair. This area is also the home of a 125-year old grapefruit tree that stands as a relic of the neighborhood's nineteenth-century history as a fruit orchard.⁷⁴ Concrete walls extend along the west and north perimeters, which Noguchi insisted on constructing in spite of objections from local

⁷² William Wilson. "Noguchi Comes Home," *Los Angeles Times*. March 31, 1980. H1.

⁷³ Little Tokyo Design Guidelines set forth acceptable plant species.

⁷⁴ Michael Several. "Noguchi Plaza and *To the Issei*: Background Information." October 1997. www.publicartinla.com. Retrieved March 2, 2013.

business owners, to maintain the scale and serenity of the space in the midst of unpredictable development, ward off encroachment and traffic noise from San Pedro Street, and conceal the end of Azusa Street, which acts as a service alley.⁷⁵ To the south, the JACCC Building opens into the space at ground level with a shaded veranda and tinted glass wall that look out onto the plaza.⁷⁶ In the southeast corner, a large circular planter accommodates a single tree set in gravel.

The far eastern perimeter of the plaza is defined by the Aratani Japan America Theatre, with the footprint of a spread fan, creating a sweeping curve in the walkway from the pedestrian mall just to the north of the plaza, and the adjacent Irvine Japanese Garden behind the JACCC Building.⁷⁷ In the center of the plaza, a ring of brick delineates a large circle, a multi-layered symbol that defines the social hub of the space where performances and ceremonies can take place surrounded by an audience. The center of the circle is paved in hexagonal brick, giving the center a smoother and more even toned surface. Throughout the plaza, one motif that reflects Noguchi's playful early earthwork designs are geometric forms set into the brick on top of each platform in stylized silhouettes of gourds and other abstract designs.⁷⁸ A dedication plaque, mounted following Noguchi's death in 1988, reads:

This plaza, a gift from the City of Los Angeles to the people of Little Tokyo, was designed by Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988) and dedicated on July 26, 1983. Crowning the plaza is the monumental sculpture by Noguchi, entitled 'To the Issei' as a tribute to the first generation of Japanese who immigrated to America...

⁷⁵ This marked a mediation between Noguchi's earlier enclosed gardens with SOM and the open space the community anticipated.

⁷⁶ The Japanese-American Cultural and Community Center was designed by the architectural firm of Adachi, Sawano & Matsunaga in collaboration with landscape architects Uesgi-Tong, completed in 1980.

⁷⁷ Kajima Associates, 1981.

⁷⁸ These were perhaps to act as ground-level water installations and play, but no record was found regarding their original intention.

The Japanese American Cultural and Community Center is honored to be entrusted with this plaza which is the first and only public installation created by Isamu Noguchi for his native city.

To the Issei is mounted on a tiered brick pedestal, elevating the sculpture as a focal point in the center of the plaza while harkening back to ancestral forms such as the tiered Kofun tumuli near Osaka. The platform opens out into the plaza space, a powerful symbol in Japanese culture. The stones, which Noguchi sculpted in Japan come from quarries near his studio on the island of Shikoku and are treated in a traditional yet abstract manner. They express the ritual of a human hand on a natural material and the differing textures and qualities of the stone, in which Noguchi was well versed through his earlier sculptural work. One piece rests at an angle across the platform, suggesting restfulness and leisure; the second stands slightly diagonal, as a Japanese symbol for mankind.⁷⁹ Their scale buffers the size of the surrounding structures from the human scale of plaza visitors. The platform steps up in four tiers (*fig. 7*); broad steps that act as welcoming seating facing the center of the plaza and allow visitors to interact with the piece, then steep and narrow to the angled rear of the platform where they are mere decoration. Between the stones, a channel zigzags across the surface of the brick with shallow circular bowls at intersecting points.

The fountain at the San Pedro Street entrance is set into a square brick base standing approximately two-and-a-half feet high and twenty feet square. In the center, a sphere projects slightly above the base, clad in square granite brick with water flowing over the rough surface from a central spout. In Zen Buddhism, water and stone create the balance of yin and yang, and water is a significant element in the Japanese gardening

⁷⁹ Several. "Noguchi Plaza and To the Issei: Background Information." October 1997.

tradition. While the fountain is only a small and discrete aspect of the plaza, it makes a powerful contribution to the composition.

Noguchi likely took many cues from the tradition of Zen landscape in his design of the JACCC Plaza, working with a dry landscape, albeit in consideration of the heavy pedestrian activity that would take place – opting to use durable brick rather than sand and stone. The plaza utilizes the traditional elements of Japanese gardening: stone, water and delicate greenery. Here, however, Noguchi explicitly worked in a modern visual language, working with clean planes, stark geometries, and modern, cost-efficient materials. This conjunction of old and new seems highly appropriate in honoring a generation of immigrants who ventured to a foreign land while maintaining their ancestral heritage and additionally relates to the backdrop of modernist architecture of the newly built JACCC Building and theater.

Current Context

Today, Little Tokyo has seen much change as new businesses and construction have changed the general pedestrian course in the area, but it has remained a fundamental nexus in the social, religious, commercial and cultural identity of California's Japanese-Americans. The neighborhood was listed as a National Historic District on the National Register in 1986, although the plaza is not discussed in the nomination. The community has dispersed over the past three decades as younger generations have moved away from the district, and the plaza now plays a greater role as a multi-cultural venue and thoroughfare than a community hub. The site is centrally located between historic downtown Los Angeles, the Civic Center, Museum of Contemporary Art, Disney Music

Hall, and the Fashion District, but is cut off to pedestrian traffic by wide streets in a city center that remains heavily automobile-dependent.

The plaza is additionally surrounded by other significant sites and memorials, including the more traditional James Irvine Japanese Gardens immediately to the east of the JACCC Building and the National Japanese American Veterans Memorial Court, honoring those who lost their lives in World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War to the south of the San Pedro Street entrance to the plaza.⁸⁰ There are incomplete plans underway to commemorate the Pentecostal Reverend William J. Seymour in the plaza.⁸¹ Most importantly, the 880-seat Aratani Theater located behind *To the Issei* hosts numerous musical and theater events every week, bringing heavy foot traffic through the plaza, which offers a pleasing and well-lit place to congregate after performances, and the George J. Doizaki Gallery, located in the JACCC Building hosts rotating exhibitions of Japanese artists.

In regard to materials, the brick is in need of considerable repairs, particularly at vulnerable corners of the terraces where the mortar joints are in poor condition and small-scale brick replacements have significantly impaired the overall aesthetic of the visual elements.⁸² The brick paving surrounding the JACCC building has been replaced and the new darker-toned and multi hue brick clashes starkly with the original bricks of the plaza. Perhaps because there is on-site security, issues such as graffiti and homelessness are not

⁸⁰ The Irvine Garden was designed by Japanese American landscape architect Takeo Uesugi in 1980.

⁸¹ During World War II, while many Japanese were interned, Little Tokyo became a predominantly African American neighborhood, known as Bronzeville. The plaza sits on the site of the Azusa Street Pentecostal Mission, which was in service from 1906 – 1935. Biddy Mason and Reverend Seymour were community and congregation leaders during this period and the site continues to draw visitors seeking to honor them. In 1999, a commemorative plaque was set into the brick paving in honor of the Azusa Street Mission revival and in 2001, a young grapefruit tree was added to the plaza in honor of Reverend Seymour by the Azusa Street Memorial Committee.

⁸² Information regarding the amount of funds spent on maintaining the plaza, including garbage removal, repairs to the brickwork, fountain maintenance and security were unavailable.

major concerns. The site is located near a parking garage and during my visits I was saddened to see that the platform of *To the Issei* was being used as a parking spot, degrading the overall purpose of the site and severely impacting its aesthetic value.

In his design of the plaza, Noguchi explained that he foresaw the space as:

*A piazza, serving a variety of purposes and functioning like a town square in Italy. Reflecting different moods, the plaza cannot be fully experienced in one visit. On quiet days, it appears stark and empty, as a space to pass through and an enclave to rest in. But during the annual cycle of festival days, the plaza is a crowded outdoor urban theater hosting public events and activities that bind the community together.*⁸³

This intention survives to this day, as the plaza shifts from vacant and solemn on weekday afternoons to crowded and lively during annual festivals such as the Children's Day Festival (*Tango no Sekku*) on May 5th or Nisei Week, when a parade of thousands pass through the plaza. It is also used for performance art pieces and movie nights, as well as being booked for private events. The plaza has previously been a destination on walking tours by the Japanese American National Museum and the Little Tokyo Historical Society and is featured on an online audio tour developed by the CRA, but these organizations, in addition to the preservation group the L.A. Conservancy don't see it as a historic site today, so it has fallen into the anonymous realm between novel and nostalgic, like many of Noguchi's public sites.

Future Planning and interventions

The area west of Little Tokyo has seen significant development pressures in the past decade, including a 2002 amendment to the 1970 CRA Little Tokyo Redevelopment

⁸³ Several. "Noguchi Plaza and To the Issei: Background Information." October 1997.

Plan, that expanded the area and increased the capacity for new residential development and hotels in the primarily commercial Little Tokyo. This plan proposes new transit lines and open space beautification for upgrading the streetscape. These changes may signify benefits for the JACCC plaza, expanding the number of people who are likely to pass through the space and understand it as place-marker for the evolving community, but it also may propose additional threats, as the plaza does not meet a contemporary understanding of an open public space in its lack of profuse greenery and explicit uses. Apart from this, the plaza is under no direct or immediate threat and is well used and appreciated by local stakeholders. While the pride of having a work by one of the twentieth-century's premier sculptors may have lost some of its original enthusiasm from the community, the appreciation for a pleasant gathering spot survives.

Preservation Recommendations

Fortunately, the Japanese-American Cultural and Community Center Plaza remains Little Tokyo's premier outdoor public plaza and continues to serve the community through various functions and fairly regular programming. The site would greatly benefit from stronger pedestrian connections from San Pedro Street and through Little Tokyo, as the commercial area transitions into smaller office uses in the short stretch before the plaza.

Activation

As seen in the case of Hart Plaza, the JACCC Plaza is poorly connected to its surroundings. The lots across San Pedro Street are comprised of two recently developed

apartment complexes with little active retail on the street level and a gated at-grade private parking lot. To the north, adjacent to the Azusa Street alley are office buildings with entrances on 2nd Street and south of the JACCC Building are medical offices and a church. The greatest volume of foot traffic during the day in this area is along the Little Tokyo commercial corridor, beginning north of 2nd Street and visually disconnected from the plaza. The JACCC does a commendable job of providing regular and diverse events at the site to draw in tourists visiting Little Tokyo as well as local residents, but these events could be extended to suit new demographics and interests, featuring a cultural food fair or exploring contemporary Japanese culture more closely.

- Intrigue passers-by with signage, perhaps featuring images of Noguchi at the site to visually enrich the history of the site. There is a span of blank wall facing San Pedro Street that protects the interior views of the plaza that is often used to highlight exhibitions at the gallery and programming at the theater, although it is also frequently left blank. This blank canvas offers an ongoing opportunity to highlight Noguchi's presence in the community at little cost.

Education

- Only one plaque at the central entrance from San Pedro Street acknowledges that the plaza was designed by Noguchi. JACCC should create additional signage to draw visitors in and inform the public about the history of the site. Inside the JACCC Building one finds a series of signs explaining the value, symbolism and history of the Japanese gardens behind the building. Similar signage could easily be developed regarding the Noguchi plaza and could be used to activate the front of the building by inviting pedestrians from the Little Tokyo pedestrian walk way and the San Pedro Street entrances.

- Create a pamphlet featuring the plaza as well as ongoing events nearby to be placed within surrounding hotels, restaurants and apartment complexes. Much of Little Tokyo's economy is driven by tourism and a simple directory would be valuable for outsiders.
- Reach out to software companies offering hand-held device applications for touring Los Angeles and highlighting JACCC and surrounding companies. The plaza could be marketed as a place to relax after exploring Little Tokyo.
- The JACCC Building is home of the George J. Doizaki Gallery, which could sell books about Noguchi in their gift store. This space also offers the potential to exhibit smaller Noguchi pieces in collaboration with the Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum, giving a broader understanding of the artist's incredible breadth, in scale and medium, of his work.
- Reach out to local groups offering tours and provide information about the plaza to incorporate it as an important piece of Los Angeles history. These include the Little Tokyo Historical Society, the Japanese American National Museum, and the LA Conservancy.

The JACCC Plaza is a site of manageable scale that has the good fortune of a non-profit management agency invested in its history and maintenance. The overall composition of the site is largely intact with manageable maintenance needs and Noguchi's intentions are clearly conveyed, despite minor unrelated additions. Because of these factors the site is easier to uphold as an artwork more than a landscape. Additional benefits include full-time security personnel and organization staff with personal ties to the artist, limiting potential threats to the design and providing further resources to better inform and engage the community.

Illustrations

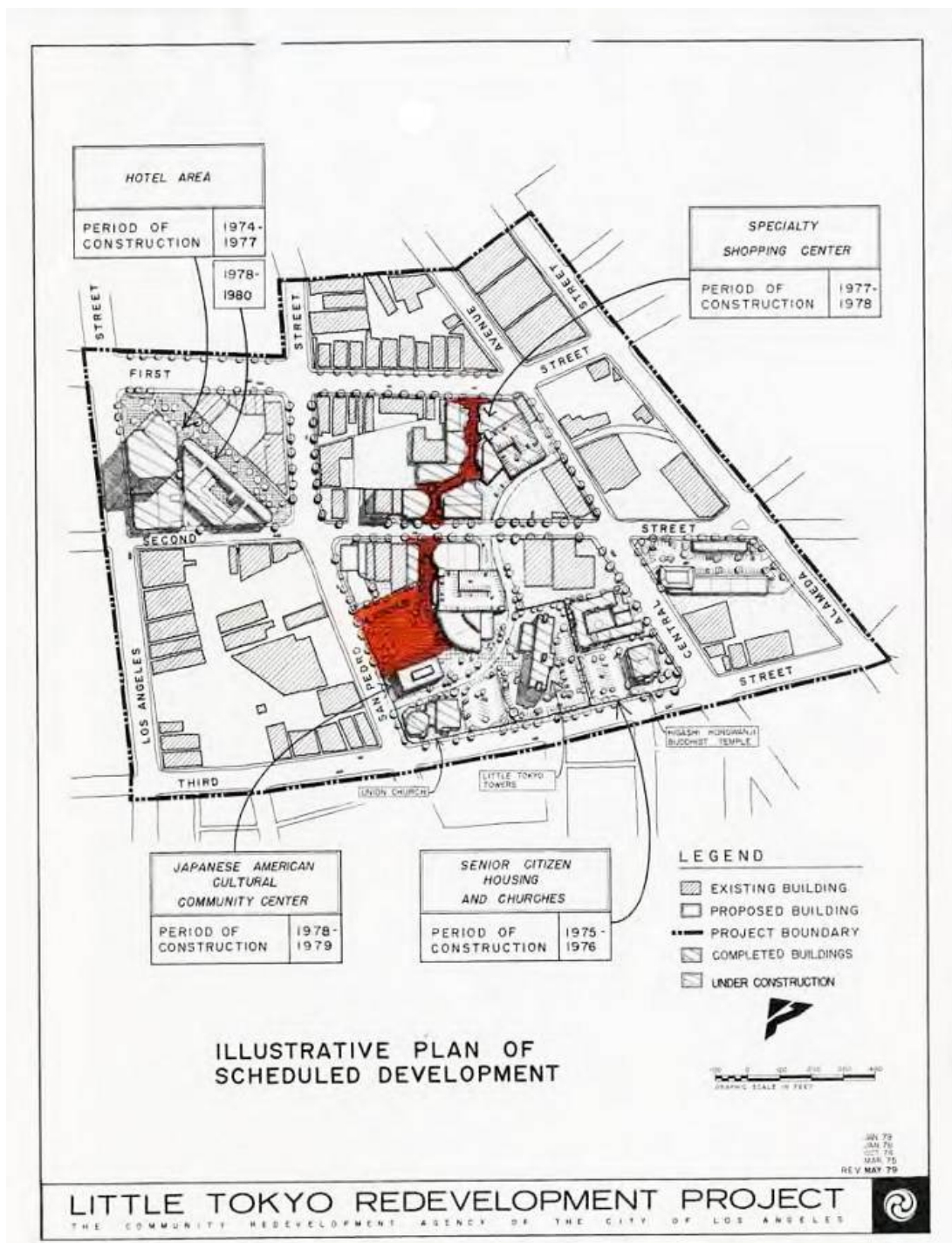


Figure 1. Map of Little Tokyo Redevelopment Project area, 1980. Plaza and central route through the pedestrian mall are highlighted in orange. Courtesy of The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.



Figure 2. Photo of the site in 1980, before groundbreaking. The plaza was previously a parking lot. Courtesy of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.



Figure 3. "Elements of sculpture, lighting and set-design can be found in the new plaza at the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center, which was created by artist Isamu Noguchi and dedicated yesterday." *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*. July 27, 1983. Photo by Paul Chinn. Courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library Photo Archives.

Figure 4. Isamu Noguchi on the steps of To The Issei, 1983. Courtesy of the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center.

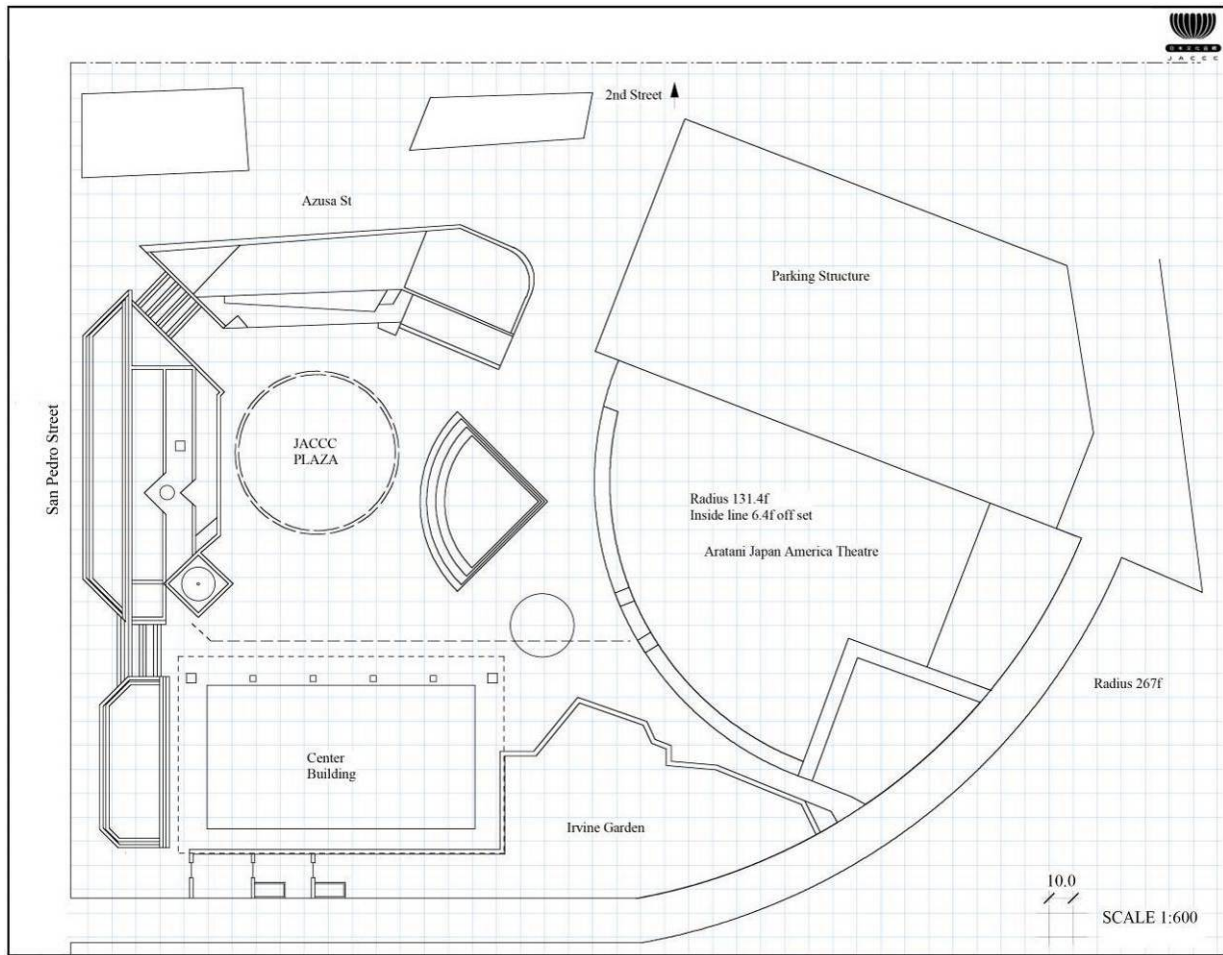


Figure 5. Existing plan of the JACCC plaza for even planning, courtesy of the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center.



Figure 6. Noguchi Plaza upon completion, 1983. Courtesy of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.



Figure 7. *To the Issei*, Current conditions. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.

Chapter Four: California Scenario

1980 - 1982

The works of Isamu Noguchi are inspiring. California Scenario will have a profound impact on the lives of all of us living within Orange County and throughout the state. It is a legacy from Isamu Noguchi to his birth place.

-Henry Segerstrom

California Scenario is often considered Isamu Noguchi's masterwork in sculptural landscape design. Located in a private courtyard of the Pacific Arts Plaza, tucked within a complex of glass-skinned office towers, the 1.6 acre site is a hidden gem among the malls and highways of Costa Mesa.⁸⁴ In many ways, *California Scenario* maintains the greatest integrity of Noguchi's public sites from his late career, and continues to serve as a key example of how the careful treatment and interpretation of his sculptural landscapes can be highly successful with adequate funding and private management.

History

In 1979, Noguchi received a visit from Henry Segerstrom, a Californian real estate developer, at his Long Island City studio. Segerstrom proposed that Noguchi design a fountain for a space tucked into a property he was developing that had once been a lima bean farm belonging to his family. As in his other projects, Noguchi won over Segerstrom and his associates with a grander vision for the space, and was shortly

⁸⁴ The plaza was originally known as Two Town Center and later South Coast Town Center. It was renamed Pacific Arts Plaza when it was purchased in 2010.

commissioned to design a small plaza for the site, ultimately costing Segerstrom's company approximately one million dollars.

Noguchi collaborated with local landscape architect Ken Kammeyer and his architectural associate for Hart Plaza, Shoji Sadao. With Kammeyer's assistance, Noguchi was able to bring a native authenticity to the site's landscaping and, following a road trip to Joshua Tree National Park, the two even attempted to convince the National Park Service to allow for the removal of "four or five large rocks from Joshua Tree national Monument for inclusion in [the] courtyard," which was respectfully declined by the Department of the Interior.⁸⁵

Design

The garden comprises seven zones that symbolize California's landscapes: Water Source, Desert Hill, Forest Walk, *Energy Fountain*, Land Use, Water Use and the plaza's centerpiece, *Spirit of the Lima Bean*, commemorating the plaza's past life as a lima bean farm. Above all of Noguchi's other public designs, *California Scenario* possesses a clear narrative that defines the site as one sculpture with many interrelated aspects, rather than an agglomeration of design pieces, as his other sites have been interpreted by many of their stakeholders. Every element of the site was thoughtfully designed by Noguchi, creating a comprehensive environment, and the stark glass and white concrete facades that enclose the space amplify the ethereal experience by reflecting an illusory light during the day. Each piece calls back to Noguchi's earlier designs and longstanding vocabulary of archaic forms.

⁸⁵ Letter from Kenneth Kammeyer to Isamu Noguchi, July 30, 1980. File Source: PRO (RP) Two Town Center – "California Scenario" 1981 (Folder 3 of 7). Archives: Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

There are three main points of entry to the garden, demonstrating the intention of the artist to create an ambulatory space to be experienced through interaction and movement. Today, at each access point visitors are offered a small map and interpretation of the site with a brief summary of the site's history and Noguchi's involvement. The plaza is paved in thick slabs of beige sandstone with a pale grout, establishing a calming, neutral palette that contrasts with the surrounding concrete and glass.

Nonrepresentational landscaping of deciduous trees was laid out at each of these entry points to soften the transition from surrounding suburban environment to the carefully crafted sculptural space. The entire site is level aside from the elevated topography of Desert Land, Land Use, and Forest Walk, each of which was raised by building a mound of concrete beneath the planting surface (*fig. 1*).

Beginning in the northeast corner, entering from the main parking facilities or the office tower at 611 Anton Boulevard, the viewer approaches the *Spirit of the Lima Bean*, a 28-ton piece standing twelve feet tall (*figs. 5,6*). The piece was sculpted by Noguchi at his Shikoku studio of Japanese Mannari granite – a beige-toned, coarse grained stone – and shipped to the site for installation. The *Spirit of the Lima Bean* was originally titled *Sculpture of Origin*, possibly honoring Noguchi's estranged father, but Segerstrom requested that the sculpture explicitly pay tribute to his family and their land, which had been his father's lima bean farm and the source of his wealth. In many ways, these familial references are related. The sculpture is comprised of fifteen rocks that cohere as a graceful mound. Each was carefully sculpted, however, their rough, rounded surfaces reflecting natural erosion rather than the hand of an artist.

Immediately east of the *Spirit of the Lima Bean*, a thick grove of redwood trees rises from the plaza's level surface (*fig. 7*). These trees wrap into a "U" form with a granite path leading along their inner edge. Forest Walk symbolizes one of California's remarkable natural treasures – the ancient redwood forests. Tucked into the sylvan niche is a dense patch of wild grass, and at the apex of the forest a small bench was placed for secluded reflection (*fig. 8*). This is the most intimate of the spaces created in *California Scenario* and offers a unique view of the entire space from its elevated vantage.

Farther west, situated in the far corner of the courtyard, is *Energy Source*, a water fountain made of a brushed stainless steel that jets water onto the cone of granite bricks below (*fig. 9*). The sculpture stands twelve feet high and twenty-five feet in diameter with a granite base. This sculpture "embodies California energy," the Golden State's seemingly endless and diverse productivity. The fountain invites viewers in from near by parking lots with its soothing sound and activity.

South of *Energy Source*, past a glade of trees that wrap around a curved granite bench with a circular table of polished granite at the center, is Land Use. A knoll of honeysuckle in the form of an oval rises eight feet above the plaza, blocking off the view of the entry to 3200 Park Center Drive from the courtyard. A massive slab of Rockville granite extends upward from the center of the mound.

West of Land Use, twelve feet from the far western wall, stands a thirty foot high sandstone wedge, feeding running water into the stream below (*fig. 10*). This design was adapted from an early unrealized project at MIT on which Noguchi had collaborated with I.M. Pei in 1964. The form is a clear reference to the Samrat Yantra Observatory in

Jaipur, India, from which Noguchi continually found inspiration.⁸⁶ The water from this piece pours into a gravel-lined stream that snakes through the southeast quadrant of the courtyard in broken forms that offer narrow bridges across its course (*fig. 12*). This flow entices visitors to walk along its edge and adds to the dynamism of the site. At the end of the stream, an irregular granite pyramid, Water Use, collects the flow at its base (*fig. 13*). The stark geometry of the piece relates to Water Source to the west and Land Use directly across the space, and creates a delicate balance among the otherwise organic forms in *California Scenario*.

Noguchi worked with Ken Kammeyer to select plant species that would thrive in the southern California climate despite long periods of solar exposure in the exposed space. For Desert Land, located in the southeast corner, an array of cacti and succulents was selected to display the diverse beauty of California's deserts (*fig. 14*). These were planted on a perfectly circular concrete mound coated in tawny sandstone gravel. Desert Land, unlike Forest Walk, does not invite the viewer to move about the mound, but its circular design encourages one to move about the piece, offering shifting vistas of the plants as well as the surrounding courtyard.

Unlike smaller sacrifices made in his publicly-funded sites, Noguchi was able to design even the most mundane features of the garden, including garbage receptacles, ash trays, and a variety of seating options, all constructed of Sierra White granite from Raymond, California (*figs. 15-19*). By overseeing such features, rather than having to

⁸⁶ Torres, Ana Maria. *Isamu Noguchi: A Study of Space* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2000), p. 217.

succumb to concerns for cost and regulation, the space has no disruptive additions in the experience of the design.⁸⁷

Integrity

In 2010 the Irvine Company, a private real estate management company based in Orange County, purchased the Pacific Arts Plaza from Segerstrom's company, South Coast Town Center. In the sale, Segerstrom and Noguchi enthusiasts ensured that the plaza would continue to be well-maintained by requiring a design review process through the City of Costa Mesa through 2060.⁸⁸ The Irvine Company is responsible for periodic walk-through assessments with Ken Kammeyer to ensure that the landscaping is maintained as intended and that overall conditions are acceptable. All maintenance is tended by third-party vendors, who oversee regular landscape maintenance, daily sweeping, and monthly power washing. Additionally, any alterations or additions require a review by the City of Costa Mesa, and none have been proposed.⁸⁹ In 2000 the Pacific Arts Plaza, then known as the South Coast Town Center, entered a formal public and private partnership in the establishment of Costa Mesa's Theater and Arts District.

While the site remains as Noguchi originally intended, there are minimal issues with material degradation such as sandstone deterioration, efflorescence in sandstone and granite, minor leaks from the base of Water Source, but the overall appearance remains in

⁸⁷ Sierra White Granite was used for bench bases, stone pavers in the Forest Walk. "Rockville" granite, which has a larger black graining, was used for the Energy Fountain base and a table top. Letter from Cold Spring Granite Company to Henry Segerstrom. March 9, 1981. File Source: PRO (RP) Two Town Center – "California Scenario" 1981 (Folder 4 of 7). Archives: Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

⁸⁸ According to staff, Irvine Company is not legally bound by a restrictive covenant. Rather, the city of Costa Mesa established a protective measure, requiring a review of all modifications and construction for fifty years following the sale.

⁸⁹ Email interview with Irvine Company associate Brittney Cinq-Mars. February 1, 2013.

its original state and no visible additions have been made. Because of this, *California Scenario* stands as a successful example of an intact public sculptural landscape by the artist. It should be noted that this site had fewer limitations on funding in its creation and because of this is also one of the most successfully realized and cohesive spaces, whereas Hart Plaza, Bayfront Park and the JACCC Plaza had to make some sacrifices in materials and overall design in the development phase.

Use

The garden is located in the Orange County suburb of Costa Mesa. Aside from the two adjacent office towers and parking structure, the complex is comprised of two chain restaurants and a bakery café, and is near a large residential apartment complex, the Segerstrom Center for the Arts, and the South Coast Plaza luxury shopping center. *California Scenario* is open and free to the public from eight in the morning until midnight every day, but aside from some literature in local tourist guides and the Laguna Art Museum, it is not heavily advertised as a destination and is normally pleasantly vacant and peaceful. The space primarily offers a place of respite for employees working in the two office towers immediately surrounding it, in addition to numerous tourists. On occasion the plaza is rented for events, including weddings, corporate celebrations, and a recent American Institute of Architects dinner, but these occur less than monthly and the plaza does not depend on funding from these events. It should be taken into consideration that this site is not only privately owned and managed, but it is also located in a suburban community that highly values scenic open space, with beaches, two golf courses and eight local or regional parks within easy driving distance of *California Scenario*.

In 2011, the Laguna Art Museum, located fifteen miles south of the South Coast Plaza, held an exhibition titled, *Noguchi: California Legacy*, in collaboration with the Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum. The exhibit honored Noguchi's Costa Mesa design as well as featuring his Akari lamps and smaller sculptural pieces in various media. The opening reception celebrated Segerstrom's contributions to southern California – the South Coast Plaza mall, the Segerstrom Center, and of course the Noguchi courtyard.

While the publicly managed sites previously discussed in this thesis cannot expect considerable private funding, there are simple lessons that can be taken away from

California Scenario:

- Provide informative signage for visitors (*fig. 20*). Noguchi's sites are complex, symbolic and often didactic, looking back on local and human history. By offering the public a simple and clear statement of his intentions, his designs would gain deeper understanding and consequentially stronger advocacy of site users.
- Provide a map of the site. Let the public know where distinctive elements of Noguchi's designs are located, what they were titled by the artist, and perhaps interesting yet brief information regarding their construction or material, which were often inventive.
- Engage with outside parties. By interacting with the local artist community, museums, and those with an interest in Japanese-American history, the stakeholder base for Noguchi support will strengthen and grow. The exhibit at the Laguna Art Museum undoubtedly drew in new visitors to California Scenario and offered an opportunity to learn something about the history of the Costa Mesa community.

- Appreciate the importance of what seem to be minor details. The addition of incompatible lighting or standardized furniture would greatly diminish the visual coherence of *California Scenario* and should not be done without serious consideration by other public sites.

Illustrations



Figure 1. 1980 Model for California Scenario, balsa wood and plaster. Here you can see the foot print of the parking garage (elevated sections at the top of the photo) as well as the sites where cement mounds had to be constructed to develop topography – Desert Land, Land Use, and Forest Walk. Image courtesy of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.



Figure 2. Aerial of California Scenario, Michio Noguchi, ca. 1995. Image courtesy of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.



Figure 3. View from west edge, looking out on the meandering stream (center), Desert Land (right), Water Use (far center), and Forest Walk. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.

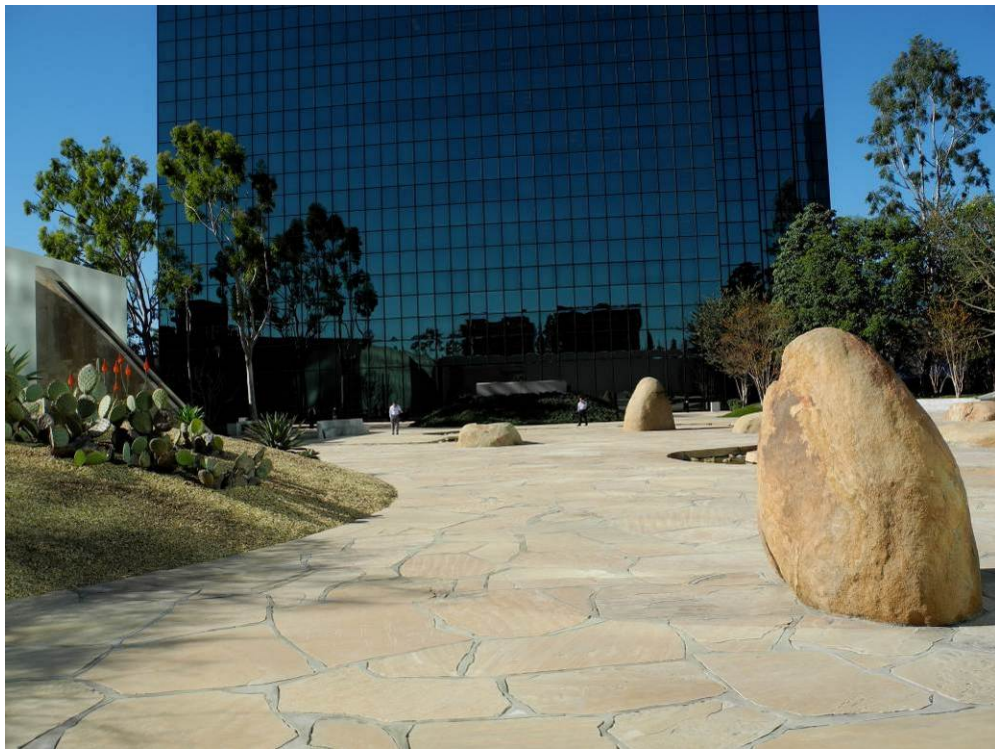


Figure 4. View from east edge, with Desert Land (far left), Land Use (obscured, center), and rock installations. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.

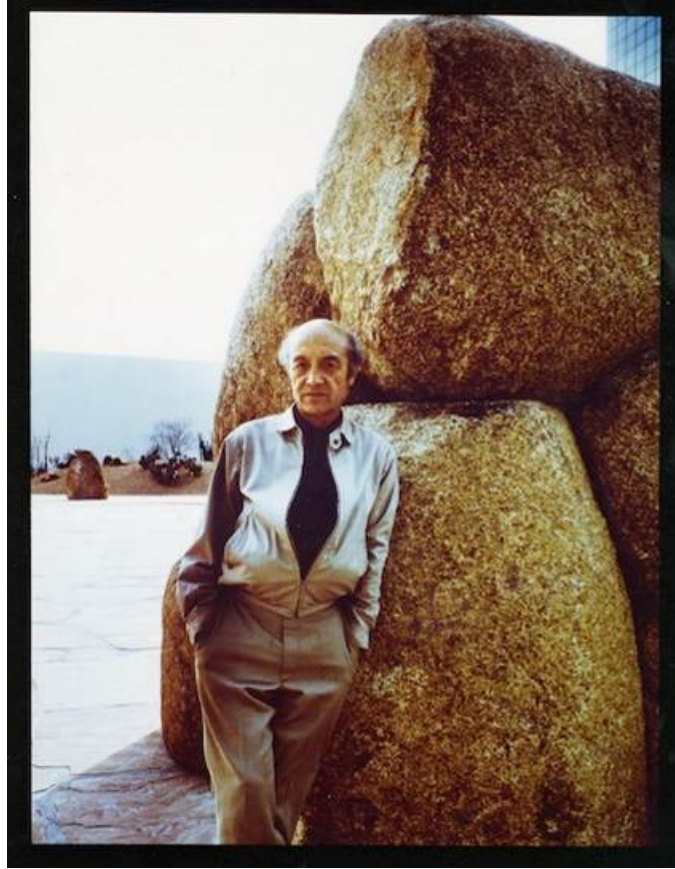


Figure 5. Isamu Noguchi and *Spirit of the Lima Bean*, ca. 1983.
Image courtesy of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

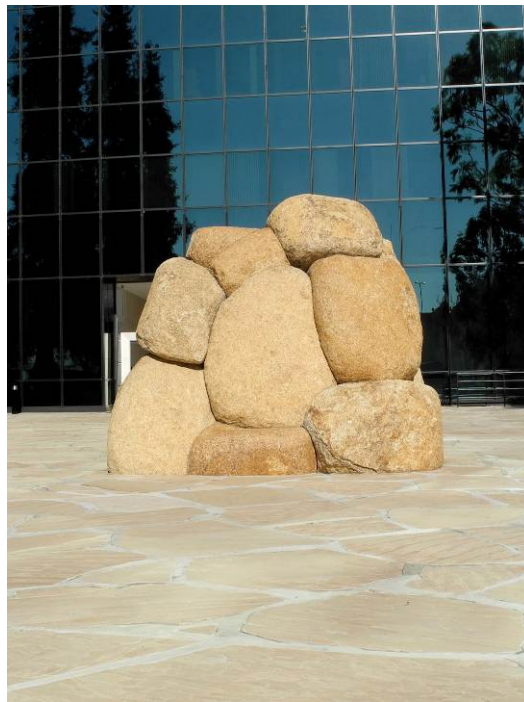


Figure 6. *Spirit of the Lima Bean*. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.

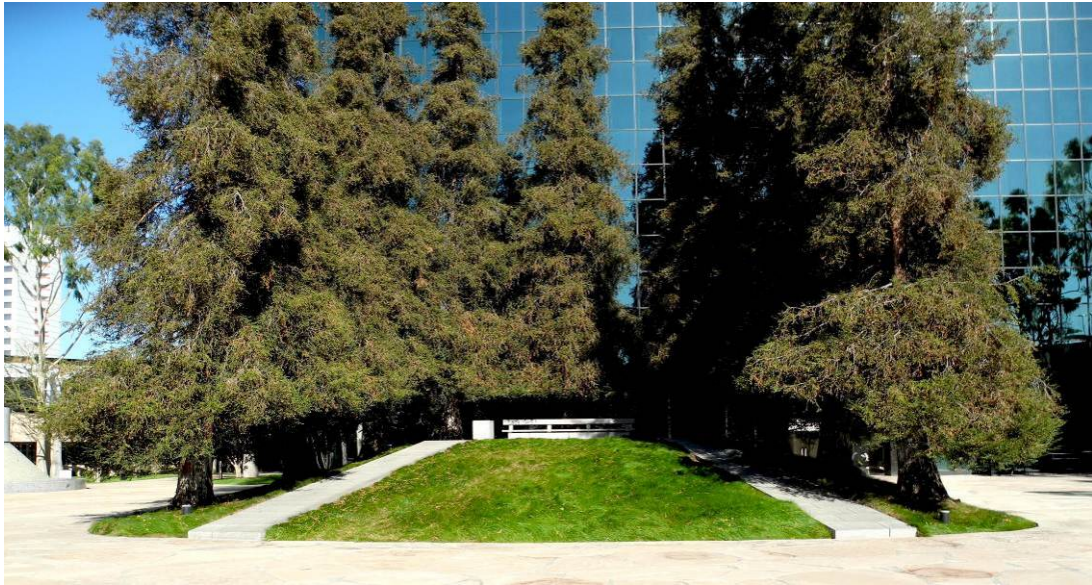


Figure 7. Forest Walk. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.



Figure 8. View from Forest Walk. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.



Figure 9. *Energy Fountain*. Photo by Michio Noguchi, ca. 1995.
Image courtesy of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.

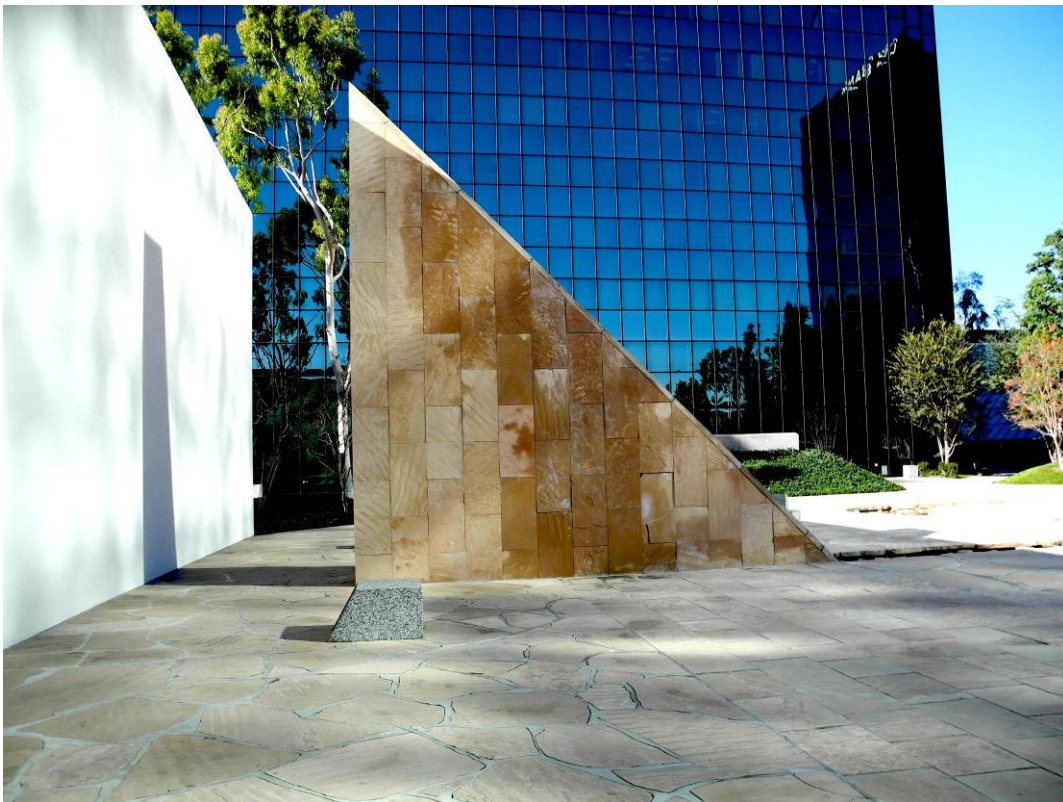


Figure 10. *Water Source* in profile. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.



Figure 11. Water Source in relation to Desert Land and environs. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.



Figure 12. Aerial view of Water Use.
Image courtesy of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.



Figure 13. Water Use. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.



Figure 14. Desert Land. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.



Figure 15. Garbage can and Bench, granite. Image courtesy of the Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum.



Figure 16. Bench in profile. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.



Figure 17. Bench. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.



Figure 17. Bench and table. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.



Figure 19. Bench and garbage cans. Photo by Alexandra Kirby, 2013.

CALIFORNIA SCENARIO

Introduced in 1980

Isamu Noguchi was commissioned to design a 1.6 acre public garden to enhance two office towers built on family land once used as a lima bean farm. California Scenario, an abstract metaphor of California's diverse natural environment, is considered to be one of Noguchi's significant contributions to Landscape Architecture.

The garden begins at a thirty-foot-high sandstone triangle named "Water Source", travels through a water and stone filled stream, and ends at "Water Use", a granite wedge.

"Forest Walk" takes visitors past a patch of California redwoods, while "Land Use" is an eight-foot-high knoll, topped with a simple form of Sierra white granite. "Desert Land" features desert plants atop a domed gravel-covered mound. The sculpture "Spirit of the Lima Bean", composed of twelve-foot-high carved granite boulders, educates visitors about the earlier use of the site. The "Energy Fountain", is twenty five-feet in diameter and made of granite bricks and stainless steel.



1

FOREST WALK

Visitors pass a patch of California redwoods to evoke one of California's salient characteristics.

2

SPIRIT OF THE LIMA BEAN

Twelve-foot-high granite boulders, indicative of the land, once used as a Lima Bean farm.

3

WATER USE

A granite wedge symbolizing the end of the California Scenario stream.

4

DESERT LAND

Symmetrical mound planted with a variety of cacti, agave and other desert plants.

5

WATER SOURCE

A thirty-foot-high sandstone triangle functions as the beginning of the stream.

6

LAND USE

Consisting of an eight-foot-high knoll, topped with a simple form of Sierra white granite.

7

ENERGY FOUNTAIN

Embodies California energy. The fountain is twelve-feet-high and twenty five-feet in diameter, and made of granite bricks and stainless steel.

MIND YOUR STEP

Part of the beauty and design of the California Scenario is its use of natural materials. As in nature, the uneven walking surfaces in the Garden require your attention. Please enjoy your visit, but take care as you stroll. Thank You.

Figure 20. Sign presented at all entrances to *California Scenario*. This explains each of the elements of the landscape.

Conclusion

There are few civic spaces that came out of the urban renewal period of the mid-1970s through 1980s that are equal in artistic value to the Noguchi sites. Most were works of experimental planners and landscape architects who approached public design and the urban experience from a very different perspective than Noguchi's. While they may not be directly comparable, all are products of the same era and presently face similar threats. By carefully examining the masterful landscape designs of this period – not only those represented in this thesis as case studies but additionally the public works of landscape architects such as Lawrence Halprin, Dan Kiley, and M. Paul Friedberg – preservationists, planners and urban designers have an opportunity to assess the role these outdoor spaces have collectively played in our recent urban history. They might then be approached with greater sensitivity for their tremendous value to their respective communities, as well as their histories and elements of design.

The site analyses in this thesis have addressed Isamu Noguchi's four realized public landscapes in the United States – sites designed by the artist as experiential environments for all to enjoy. Collectively, they represent a late phase in Noguchi's career during which he traversed many boundaries in the field of sculpture. In a 1948 interview with *Architectural Forum*, Noguchi explained that “at some point architecture becomes sculpture, and sculpture becomes architecture; at some point they meet. We have to discover what that point is.”⁹⁰ It is not clear if he ever reached a conclusion in this deliberation, but rather opted to continue exploring how to push such boundaries. Noguchi embraced the human desire to interact with art and space, and in these designs

⁹⁰ Harris Armstrong. “Progress in St. Louis,” *Architectural Forum*, October 1948, p. 74.

he invited the public to become part of his work through interaction and engagement. In this way he broke down traditional barriers of art and directly involved the public in his work, not only as viewers and users, but as caretakers. By accepting the commissions to these works, Noguchi became a participant in the democratic process that surrounds public space, making his sites more susceptible to change and shifting perceptions.

Noguchi designed many public sculptures, and as recognized works of art, they will be protected for future generations to enjoy. His public spaces, on the other hand, are largely understood as landscapes rather than as art pieces. This makes Noguchi's public spaces difficult to assertively categorize and, more importantly, to safeguard.

Unfortunately, due to their perception as public spaces rather than individual artistic works within a protective setting, they require a much broader and complex understanding of the artist's intention than do traditional "works of art." The public and representative agencies have a voice in the perceived value or obsolescence of the spaces, rendering them vulnerable to unsympathetic change or, conversely, to enduring preservation.

Because these sites are highly contingent, they can just as easily lose from being designated strictly as art works as they can win. From my interpretation of Noguchi's correspondences and writings, it is evident that he hoped to see these plazas and parks well-used as elements of the urban fabric, not as passive or alienating spaces, as high art might be. Were they defined as such, they would require only the attention of art conservationists, who are less likely to approach them with a primary concern for their public use, let alone be familiar with preservation practices for architectural materials such as brick, stone and concrete. Furthermore, these sites haven't been recognized by

either preservation organizations, such as the LA Conservancy and local Historic Preservation commissions, or by public art non-profits. These sites are endangered by their own duality.

California Scenario represents a high standard for the successful, continuous preservation of the complete site as an artwork. The Hart and JACCC Plazas share similar qualities and provide currency as works of art due to the elements of a cohesive design. These works in particular should be aggressively preserved for this reason, and designated as complete and irreplaceable artworks, not unlike Noguchi's *Playscapes*. As such, each could potentially be incorporated into the collections of local museums to fortify their perception as invaluable assets to the community. It is difficult to make the same case for Bayfront Park, because its original fragmentary design has been further eroded by unsympathetic additions and modifications. Noguchi's individual elements have a strong presence in the park and merit preservation measures independently, but as a complete work it is inordinate to argue for the reversal of recent additions or long-term protection of the planned greenery or generic design of the amphitheaters. Each site stands on its own as a singular artwork, and while no definite plans are currently underway for modifying or redesigning the sites, stakeholders must be vigilant in protecting the existing character and design of each of his public spaces. Presently, their greatest threat is clearly that of neglect, which is likely to cause the most irreparable impacts to the site designs, and requires an imperative response from respective stewards and communities.

The most complicated of the sites is Detroit's Hart Plaza, which has essentially been preserved by neglect. Here, Noguchi's design was certainly cohesive and the elements have clear associations between one another, but the numerous incompatible additions and dire material state of the plaza have severely diminished its integrity. This site is the most endangered of the three, as the city of Detroit is beginning to reassess its riverfront, and Hart Plaza is also the most important of the public sites assessed in this thesis, being Noguchi's first and most inventive urban renewal project. Of the three works, Hart Plaza is most clearly eligible for the National Register under criteria B and C, despite not meeting the traditional fifty-year requirement, and this may be the first step to ensuring its survival.

A final important question to take into consideration is: what would the active preservation of these sites imply as a precedent? Noguchi's public spaces undoubtedly play a role in the broader conversation surrounding the preservation of modern landscape design. By bolstering a vocal base of invested stakeholders, protecting Noguchi's sites may set a progressive tone for a much larger debate that has grown heated in recent years, following the partial demolition of Lawrence Halprin's Skyline Park in Denver, Colorado and numerous other sites that are at immediate risk, such as M. Paul Friedberg's Peavey Plaza in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Because of their contingency, public landscapes face more complex preservation issues than traditional architecture does. There is no doubt that Hart Plaza will face the threat of modification if not total redesign in the coming years, and only through the efforts of a knowledgeable and prescient community will its integrity be safeguarded as Noguchi's most significant public space. By setting Hart Plaza and its modernist companions into the public's historic understanding of the urban

landscape, preservationists have the opportunity to expand their protective scope and shift prevailing attitudes surrounding the post-war era.

Because of their diverse locations, intentions and designs, each site clearly requires a thoughtful and distinctive approach to preservation. Fortunately, JACCC and Bayfront Park have the benefit of designated management – agencies responsible for overseeing funding and maintenance. As seen in the preservation recommendations in each of the case studies, there are many common approaches from which the sites would benefit, but these measures would be inefficient and perhaps in vain without guiding principles set forth by their particular stewards. Regardless of their fates, what each of these sites requires above all is a comprehensive master plan with long-term goals and effective planning measures to see them through. Such planning must address both broad issues of increasing awareness of the sites and enhanced engagement with their respective communities, as well as exploring the individual subtleties and unique expectations of differing user groups. Education and further programmatic activation are of paramount importance. Only with these measures will material preservation be successfully realized.

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